

Title: *The Lying Woods*

Author: Ashley Elston

Genre: Mystery

Reviewer Name and Grade: Anton P. grade 8

Date Reviewed: February 26, 2020

The book's main character is Owen Foster, a boy from a wealthy family in New Orleans. His family's fortune and all of their possessions get taken when it is found that his dad has stolen millions from the town and ran off with the money. Because of this, he and his mom are forced to move into a small town called Lake Cane to live with his aunt. Almost everyone in the town hates Owen and his family for what his father did and how it ruined many other's families and now they often get threats. Nobody wants to approach Owen, not even his old friends. He accepts an offer to work for a man named Gus in an orchard named Preacher woods where it is known that his father once lived. The book has two timelines in every chapter, the second one contains his father, Noah Bennette and how he came to this same town in the summer of 1999 and also worked for Gus in the same orchard in exchange for living in a small house on the property and how he falls in love with Abby, Owen's mother at the orchard. Owen tries hard to find out and track down if his father is guilty and if so where he is and where he hid the money. Owen has one thing from his father, a note suggesting that he should meet him at the burger place wednesday night on his Thanksgiving break. Now that this date is approaching, Owen is getting very anxious about the night they are going to meet when something arrives at the Preacher woods, a gravestone for Gus Trenadau dating his death to about 5 months ago. This puzzles Owen because this means that the man that he was working for was never the person he claimed to be. The second story proceeds as Noah is driving Abby to the movies when a police officer pulls them over as they have found narcotics in their car and Noah goes to jail for over a decade. Later it is found that Noah's friend, Robert Foster has framed him and used the moment to get with and marry his Abby. Abby had a baby but the biological father was Noah, not Robert. Going back to Owen, he goes to the burger place as suggested by his father's note with his mom and while waiting for Robert, Gus walks in. It turns out that "Gus" has been his biological father, Noah who pretended to be Gus just to spend time with his son. In the end, the story gets twisted into a parallel of what it was originally.

Did the plot keep you interested? Yes, I found the plot to be very captivating.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right? I think the book went at just the right pace.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for? I think the book is just right for anyone in 8th grade or above.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to? Anyone who likes mystery books.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book? One thing a teenager must know before picking this book is that it follows two different stories and this may confuse some readers.

I would rate this book 4 on a scale of 1-5.

This is because the plot is very exciting and keeps the reader curious about what's next. I really liked the characters and how a lot of them went through a character arch, for example how Owen really transformed from being spoiled to enjoying what he still has.

Reviewed by: Bradley K. 8th grade

Reviewed on: March 22, 2020

In the book *The Lying Woods*, by Ashley Elston, the main protagonist Owen Foster discovers that his whole life is a lie when he learns that every one of his possessions, every vacation he's ever been on, and his private school tuition at Sutton's Academy has been purchased using stolen money, money his dad embezzled from his fracking company in an elaborate scheme, and has now run away with the fortune. The book opens with Owen being asked to leave Sutton's when his father's crimes are realized and follows his journey as he must acclimate to his new home, the same place his father devastated with his scheme, causing many of his employees to go bankrupt, and some to die. Needless to say, the denizens of Lake Cane, his hometown are quite disgruntled with his father's actions, and seeking someone to vent their grievances upon, they look to the protagonist. Owen's first days in Lake Cane are filled with strife, even his best friend, a girl named Pippa, won't speak to him. The first ray of hope Owen sees is when he encounters a strange hermit, named Gus, he offers Owen a job cleaning up his dilapidated plantation. Owen is lent a pickup truck and paid a meager salary, but what he comes to learn about his parents, is worth far more. This brings me to what makes this book so interesting, the story of Noah Bennett, which alternates with that of Owen's. Noah is an outcast 19 year old felon, who comes to Lake Cane seeking a job, and a job he finds, at the same plantation Owen now works. *This* story takes place in 1999 over a decade before the events of the main story. Noah meets a girl named Margaret Ann Everett, Owen's mother, He becomes closer with her and we are led to believe that he is indeed the protagonist's father and the man who embezzled the fracking fortune. However in an expectation defying plot twist this is shown not to be the full truth. The main story takes place in the late 2010's but Noah's tale is set in the year 1999. Noah is humble, and good hearted, seeking to make amends for the mistakes he made back home. His counterpart Owen is courageous, perhaps a bit conceited, but still seeking to do the right thing for his mother, Margaret, who comes across as hopeless and delicate at times, she's known to be excellent at cooking, and able to connect and empathize with others. Gus is a pecan plantation owner who is of great importance to the story, employing both Noah and Owen during their time in Lake Cane. He is kind, Trusting, and Cares deeply for those around him. His wife, Abby passes away shortly into Noah's story, sending him into a deep depression.

Did the plot keep you interested?

Yes. Not just a yes, but an emphatic one at that. This story's strong suit is the way the story is told and the tremendous skill that went into weaving together not one, but two stories with perfect cohesion and excellent twists and turns along the way.

Was the pace too fast, too slow, or just right?

Once again, the book was paced extraordinarily well, I planned to read the book in a week, but the fast moving nature of the story led me to finish it in less than half that time, one night I planned to read 50 pages, but ended up reading over 150 because the book just kept me so engaged.

What grade levels is this book appropriate for?

Unless one is staunchly opposed to the use of mild profanity in their literature, which there is quite a lot of in this book, namely within the conversations Owen has with his friends. I would highly recommend this book to them. This book is appropriate for grades 6 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

This book is a must-read for anyone. No exceptions, everyone should read this book. It weaves together so many themes, it's poetic, it will upset you, intrigue you, and make you just want to tear further into the book.

What other information would be useful for teens to know about this book?

While reading this book I found that it was helpful to recall small details to help you put together the bigger picture of the overarching story. For example, we are told early on that Owen's mom is a fantastic cook, and later on in Noah's story we are reminded of this when Margaret "Maggie" is shown to be throwing together soups of all kinds out of spare ingredients in the kitchen to feed Gus's ailing wife, Abby.

Rating: 5 stars

At the beginning of the book, the dialogue comes across as superficial and strange, the prime example comes during Abby's funeral when Margaret says to Gus "This sucks," and Gus replies with "You have no idea how bad this sucks." People don't talk like this. This is ludicrous and I knew that if the book continued this way I believed that it would merit a two or even one star review. Luckily, this turned around immediately, and you could really empathize with the characters and understand what they're going through. The storytelling was great, the plot was phenomenal, and the character development was unlike anything I've experienced before. For

these reasons the book deserves a special place in my memory and an enthusiastic five star review.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Benjamin W. 8th grade

Date Reviewed: June 14, 2020

This book takes place during two different time periods. The first one follows Owen and the second follows Noah about 18 years earlier during the summer of 1999. The setting of this book is in a town called Lake Crane. A few miles outside the town, there is a pecan orchard with a huge house and lots of property.

Money was never a problem for Owen Foster. However, one day his mom shows up at his private school carrying shocking news. His entire privileged life had been paid for by stolen money taken from basically his entire town. His father had run off with millions of dollars leaving Owen and his mom to face the consequences. Owen goes back to Lake Crane to finish his last year of high school with nothing left. There, he is hated for what his father did and receives multiple threats from an anonymous person. The only place where he can find peace is in a pecan orchard owned by Gus Trundeu. A whole mystery is waiting to be discovered there and it may hold the answers to everything that has happened recently. Owen is determined to find out what happened to his dad's company and his dad himself.

Money has always been a problem for Noah. After a terrible childhood, he ends up near Lake Crane looking for a job from Gus Trundeu. He tries to rebuild his life and things are looking good until Gus' wife Abby dies. Abby's family comes to her funeral and that's when Noah meets Robert. The two of them don't end up getting along and Noah soon finds himself in trouble with the law again.

Owen Foster is a rich kid who goes to a boarding school and gets everything that other kids always wish for. He wants everyone in his old town to see that he is still the same person but everyone views him differently now. Everyone blames him for the stuff his father did. His former best friend is a girl named Pippa who is tough and pretty. Her family got screwed as much as everyone else's when Owen's dad cut and ran but she's at least a little nicer to him. Noah is the opposite of Owen. He came from St. Louis with no money or luggage. His parents hadn't cared about him so he ran away from home and lived with a couple other guys like him. He has been in trouble with the law but made a promise to himself to stay clean. When he arrived in Lake Crane, he met Margaret Ann (Maggie) who is kind and an amazing cook. Both Noah and Owen end up on the property of Gus Trundeu.

Now, I will answer some questions about the book:

Did the plot keep you interested? - This plot definitely kept me interested. I got pulled further and further into the story with each chapter as more things were revealed. There was a level of suspense that will make you want to know how the book ends.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right? - I think the pace of this book was just right. The author always added some action like fights to prevent the book from moving too slow but she didn't constantly throw new things at you. Since the book follows two characters in different time periods, there was no shortage of things to keep the book moving.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for? - I think this book is appropriate for kids in grades 7-10. The book has parts that talk about alcohol or drugs so I don't think this book is appropriate for younger kids. The author also uses some curse words which is another reason

why it isn't for younger kids. However, I don't think the book was too challenging to read so it might be on the easier side for kids in higher grades to read.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to? - I would recommend this book to almost any type of reader. Although this book is a mystery, it felt like a combination of realistic fiction and mystery. This book would be good for a reader who likes a good plot that just pulls you in. I wouldn't recommend this book to a reader who likes fantasy or a ton of action.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book - All the characters from the two different stories are linked in some way. But you have to read until the end to figure out how.

I would rate this book *5 stars*. The plot of this story was really good and it kept me interested for the entire book. The author made everything very clear so I didn't get confused on any parts. She added a good number of events to keep the book moving along and all the characters were well developed. I really have nothing to complain about this book.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Oliver W. 8th grade

Date Reviewed: June 14, 2020

Owen Foster is living a happy life at a boarding school called Sutton's in New Orleans, Louisiana. He is a hardworking and athletic boy in his senior year but also has a naughty side to him, as he likes to pull pranks on his best friend Jack. He is used to getting everything that he needs and not having to worry about money. But suddenly, his dad disappears, taking along with him all of his company's money, and all of the company's employees' money as well. Owen's dad had owned a fracking company called Louisiana Frac, which was the major employer of the small town of Lake Cane, and most of the other companies in Lake Cane relied on Louisiana Frac for business. Owen had received a letter from his dad the day before, telling him to meet him at a burger place on the Wednesday of Thanksgiving break, but he doesn't tell anyone this. Owen must come back to his hometown, Lake Cane, now. All of his possessions have been taken and are being auctioned, and he has to go to a school where everybody despises him. His dad's disappearance has affected every business in town and has left mostly everybody with no money, including Owen's family. All Owen wants is to go back to Sutton's where all his friends are. He must now live with his aunt, which neither he nor his mom has a good relationship with.

On the advice of the detective working with his family, whose name is Detective Hill, Owen goes for a run and reaches a pecan orchard, where his dad used to work. A man named Gus offers him a job, as well as a truck since Owen doesn't have a car now. Owen's mom starts getting threats, and the violence in them escalates as the true extent of what his dad did is revealed. Everyone in town thinks that Owen and his mom know where his dad and all the money is. His mom, who is a great chef, tries to hide her troubles from Owen and wants Owen to go back to Sutton's when Jack's dad offers to pay for his tuition. But Owen realizes that he can't leave his mom to fend for herself. After a few days of getting only dirty looks and getting into fights, Owen starts to make a few friends, including his childhood best friend Pippa. But when Owen discovers that not everyone is what he thinks they are, and he goes to meet his dad, unexpected secrets that had been kept from him his whole life are revealed, and he hopes to get his life under control once again.

This book is split between two characters' points of view. The other part of the book talks about a boy named Noah in the summer of 1999, who comes to work for Gus at the orchard after being homeless for a while, and meets a girl named Maggie. Noah has gotten in trouble with the

law many times before. So when he starts dating Maggie, her family doesn't approve. This section of the book also shows Gus' early struggles as his wife Abby suffers from cancer, and eventually dies. When Noah gets in trouble with the law again, he is separated from Maggie. The two time periods that this book takes place in is the summer of 1999 and the year 2017. I know this because Owen was born in 1999 and is 18 when the story takes place.

Q: Did the plot keep you interested?

A: I thought the plot was very interesting, and it ended in a completely different way than I expected. I was confused while reading the book how all the characters were connected and why certain details were included, but it all came together at the end.

Q: Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

A: At the start of the book, the inciting incident happened pretty quickly and the problem was laid out immediately, but after that, the plot slowed down until the end, when it sped up again. Overall, I think the very beginning and end had a pretty good pace but the middle was a little too slow, though I do realize how the details that were revealed during that section are important to the story.

Q: What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

A: I think this book would be appropriate for people in grades 6 and up. There is some profanity, but there is nothing terribly inappropriate about this book. The language isn't that advanced or confusing, and I had no trouble reading it.

Q: What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

A: I would recommend this book to readers who enjoy mysteries and plot twists in their books. The book switches between two characters' points of view, from different time periods. So this book may not be for people who would rather have a continuous plot that doesn't jump around.

Q: What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

A: I think it would be helpful for teens reading this book to know that there is some cursing in the book, as well as scenes of people getting drunk and being caught with drugs.

I would rate this book *4 stars*. The plot was pretty engaging and it was an interesting mystery that made the reader wonder how it was going to end. I think the author portrayed the character of Owen well, as someone who didn't give up and loved his mom. Owen even tried to get back some of the jewelry that meant a lot to his mom with the little money that he had from working for Gus when all his stuff was auctioned off, not caring that everyone would be staring at him. I also enjoyed how the book switched between different views in different years. This allowed the reader to guess how these two scenes were connected, and it was cool to see how the author tied things together between the two groups of people at the end. The reason that I didn't rate this book 5 stars was because I would have liked if the solutions to the mystery were revealed in parts instead of all at once. The whole explanation of what happened was crammed into the end, and it would have been more interesting if Owen discovered things over time, in my opinion.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Peter S., 10th Grade

Date Reviewed: January 4, 2021

Owen Foster's family is wealthy. He's a teenage boy who attends the exclusive boarding school Sutton's, where he's been enrolled since sixth grade. His father is a fracking magnate, head of the company Louisiana Frac, which Owen's grandfather founded. All is well, until Owen's mother appears at the school with the urgent news that their entire life had been funded by money embezzled from the company and from its workers. Owen's father has fled their town, and the company, the largest employer in their area, was left in shambles. With almost the entire town either out of business or left with no money and out of a job, and Owen's family destroyed by the departure of his father, he is forced to come back to his hometown of Lake Cane, where Louisiana Frac was located and all of his family's belongings are being sold at auction. Owen finds that he and his mother, the remaining members of his family, are hated in the town, because a vast majority believes that his mother knows where his father is and where the money is. Owen is shocked by the transition, and runs until he reaches an isolated pecan orchard, manned by a secretive man named Gus, who seems to know Owen better than Owen knows himself. Owen begins to work at the orchard, which soon becomes first his sanctuary from the hatred he receives, but later a place of happiness, especially the Preacher Woods section. As Owen and his mother begin to receive threats and Owen ponders the meaning of an odd note he received from his father while still at Sutton's, he decides to determine what exactly happened at Louisiana Frac, uncovering a terrible injustice that looms over the part of the orchard which he has claimed as his own, destroying everything Owen believed about his family and his father.

The pace of this book was unstable, but reasonable. It moved very quickly towards the end, but not too quickly as to where I wouldn't understand what was going on. The reading level in this book is generally low. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in the mystery genre especially, but I would really recommend it to anyone. I would advise that a reader pays attention to small details throughout the book, because I didn't pick up on them and I had to sit and think about the end of the book.

Overall, I give this book *five out of five stars*. It was a perfect blend of romance, mystery, and general realistic fiction, and I was interested in the plot throughout the entire book. I felt like I was with Owen in some parts, figuring out the mystery with him. I would recommend this book to anyone.

Reviewer Name and Grade: Naysa T., 7th Grade

Date Reviewed: February 21 2021

This book takes place in 2018 and starts off with the main character, Owen Foster, at his boarding school in New Orleans. Owen wakes up to a post-it note stuck on his forehead. It is from his friend and fellow prankster Jack Cooper about payback. Owen does not see Jack all day

during school but the Principal does and sends Owen to his office. Owen assumes this is because of Jack and starts blaming him but it is really about Owens father. Owens' mother is in the principal's office as the news is being broken. Owens' father owns an oil drilling and mining business called Louisiana Frac. Owens' father stole money from his employees, devastating the small Louisiana town where it is located. Owens' dad disappeared with millions of dollars of employees pension money. Now the employees have no job, no retirement money, and the company is worthless. Owen cannot believe his ears and his mother is on the verge of tears. His mother is pulling him out of the school for safety reasons and they go to Lake Cane, the small town where Louisiana Frac was located. As a detective is driving Owen and his mother, he notices that Owen is a runner and says that down the road there is a nice pecan orchard to run by. When Owen and his mother get to his aunt's house Owen starts to run. Now we go to summer of 1999 where a young man named Noah is getting off a bus in Lake Cane. Where Noah gets off is a beautiful pecan orchard and he is there to look for a job and a man named Gus lets him be his farm hand. Back to the present when Owen runs as far as he can he can barely walk, and goes to the pecan orchard. A man who says his name is Gus gives him a ride home. He offers Owen a job on his farm and Owen takes it. Owen starts his new school and gets into fights because of his father. Owen sees his old friend Pippa. He tries to talk to her but Pippa is upset with his father. As Owen is working with Gus he learns that Gus has not left his farm in years, because his wife passed. When Owen is at home he and his mother get threats and Owen wants to know where his dad is. In summer 1999 a teenager named Maggie goes to Gus's farm to deliver food for his wife, who has cancer. Noah and Maggie start to talk but Maggie's parents are very strict and don't know about them. When Gus's wife dies and her family comes and her nephew becomes friends with Noah. In the present Owen and Pippa become friends and Owen gets a note from his father asking to meet him. In summer 1999 Maddie and Noah go out in Maggie's car and they get pulled over. The police found drugs and arrested Noah. The person who really put the drugs in the car was Gus's wife's nephew. Robert then makes a deal with Maggie to marry her because Maggie's parents are very strict. Maggie has a child, and they would lie and say that it's Roberts and they would get married. Owen goes to meet his father but only sees Gus at the meeting spot. The man Owen thought to be Gus is really Noah, after he got out of prison and Maggie is his mom. Noah is Owen's father and Maggie is overjoyed to see him.

Did the plot keep you interested?

The plot of this book certainly kept me interested. It was interesting to see Owen look for his father and deal with the pressure. I like how the story kept switching to summer 1999 as a break from the main problem.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right.

The pace of this book was just right. The amount of suspense was right, and the rising action to Owen meeting with his father was good.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grades 6 and up.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to.

I would recommend this book to a reader who likes mystery and realistic fiction.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Some other information that I think would be helpful for teens to know about this book is that it goes back and forth from the present and past.

Rating:

I give this book 5 stars! I'm really glad i read this book, it was awesome! I liked the two storylines coming together in the end, and how the mystery was partially solved, but some was left up to imagine.