

Book Review: We All Live Here
By Jojo Moyes

Author Jojo Moyes has a great knack for character development, especially female characters. Her past novels “The Giver of Stars” and “Someone Else’s Shoes” speak to that. As does her newest work, “We All Live Here.”

But in this latest novel, she also demonstrates her understanding of the male psyche and mindset. The result is a moving, character-driven novel that will keep you engaged throughout.

Lila Kennedy’s life is in chaos. The 42-year-old is a recently divorced mother of two girls – Celie and Violet, ages 16 and 8, respectively – with an ex-husband who left her for another woman who is now expecting a child. Lila’s career as a writer is in flux, her house seems in need of constant repair, and her stepfather has recently taken up residence in her home following her mother’s death. And if that’s not enough, her estranged birth father, Gene, a well-recognized actor who she hasn’t seen in almost 35 years, shows up on her doorstep.

That may sound like a lot of characters to keep track of, but Moyes does a superb job of blending current narrative with backstory to make them relatable and identifiable – warts and all. That’s no easy task, given there is no specific plot here. It’s six months in the lives of a blended family, and because we can see ourselves in them, we’re easily drawn deeper and deeper into their drama.

What are the challenges a mother of two faces when her husband walks out the door? How about a widower who abruptly lost the love of his life? Or an aging actor down on his luck amid an absence of roles? Or a teenage girl dealing with growing pains in the form of school cliques and peer pressure to join in or be cast out?

These are real life issues. And Moyes’ characters address them, though not always successfully. Because, after all, we’re only human. We make mistakes.

And the way we handle those mistakes speaks volumes about these characters' ability to grow and adapt.

The last few chapters are a bit funky in that some of the events are highly implausible. It's clearly Moyes' way to wrap up a lengthy family saga, and it's not necessarily disturbing. Just a bit of a stretch.

But overall, "We All Live Here" offers a huge slice of life for an unconventional family, and their realities are not unlike those we face every day.

Four-and-one-half stars for Moyes' latest novel. It's not perfect, but it's real close.