

LoveReading Reader reviews of The Trouble with Goats and Sheep by Joanna Cannon

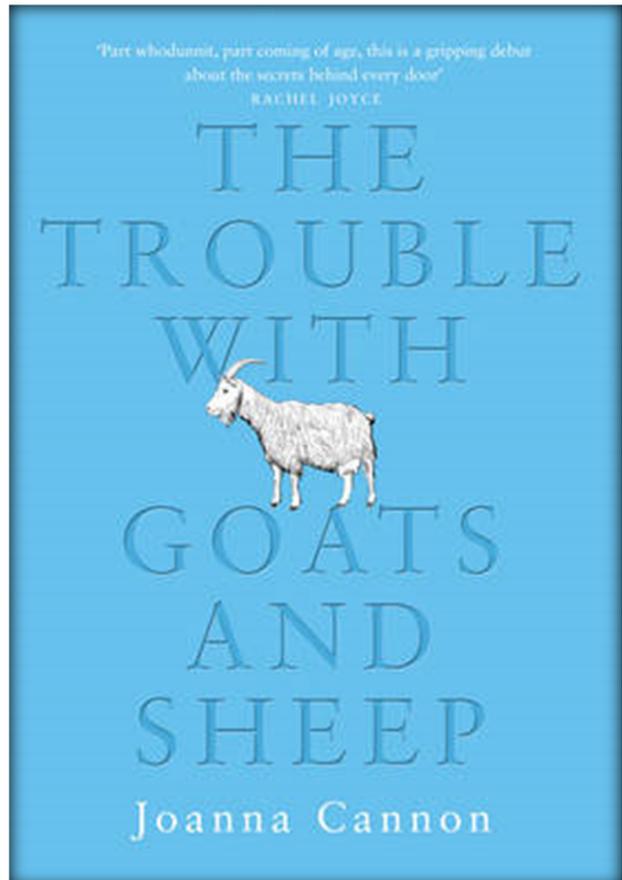
Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Ann Peet

Delightful debut novel - a mysterious disappearance, an avenue of hidden secrets, two young girls finding out about the world of adults - terrific.

I'm surprised to see that this is a first novel as it is haunting, charming and well written. The setting is a suburban avenue in the long hot summer of 1976. A woman goes missing; the rumours and accusations start and secrets are uncovered. It stands out though because much of the story is seen through the eyes of ten-year-old Grace who, with her friend Tilly, decides to try to find out the truth behind the disappearance.

I loved the way the suffocating heat is described adding to the tension as we find out more about the different characters who live in the street. Grace and Tilly are portrayed with empathy and understanding. Indeed, it is partly a "growing-up" novel as Grace finds out about the adult world. There is the mystery of the missing woman but the book is more about the way people judge each other and leap to conclusions about anyone who is a bit "different". It is very perceptive yet there is humour and it is beautifully paced so it is difficult to put down. A great debut from a very talented writer.



Linda Hill

Perfect writing packed with emotion, this is going to be THE success of 2016.

Just occasionally there comes a book that is perfect, and Joanna Cannon's "The Trouble with Goats and Sheep" is one of them. I'm reluctant to write a review, as I can't possibly do justice to this novel. The writing is word perfect. There isn't a dissonant note anywhere. Joanna Cannon's masterful, understated and beautiful prose reveals more about character and feeling than any writer I've encountered in a very long time.

So seamless is the writing that I didn't even notice the switch from Grace's first person account to the third person of other characters. I didn't so much read "The Trouble with Goats and Sheep" as live it. I was Grace as I read and I'd defy anyone not to find elements in Grace and Tilly that reflect themselves as children.

The attention to detail, and especially the quality of the metaphors, makes "The Trouble with Goats and Sheep" a kaleidoscope of emotion to read. It is breathtakingly beautiful.

*The longing, the loneliness, the love all shine through, their light blurring the distinction between goats and sheep in a lesson for life for all of us. This may be billed as part coming-of-age and part mystery story and it is, but that does it a disservice. **"The Trouble with Goats and Sheep" is a beautiful, comical, sad, and utterly, utterly wonderful tale of humanity. Joanna Cannon has touched my heart with her novel. I won't be parting with it.***

<http://lindasbookbag.com/>

Anne Cater

There are passages, sometimes just a line, that make the reader stop & re-read, purely to delight in the way that that the words are put together. This is an ambitious story, but also a beautiful one.

Mrs Creasy has disappeared. Her husband wanders the street, waiting for her to return; he is convinced that she will be home in time for their Wedding Anniversary. Grace and Tilly are ten-year-olds and are determined that they will find Mrs Creasy, but first they will have to find God, because God is everywhere and God knows everything. God will know what has happened to Mrs Creasy.

The adults on The Avenue are concerned about Mrs Creasy's disappearance too. They know that she visited most houses on the street. Some of them know what they had told her. They all worry about how much she knows, and what she is going to do with her knowledge.

The reader settles quickly and comfortably amongst the residents of The Avenue, amongst 'the belongs' and those who 'unbelong'. The huge secret that the residents keep slowly comes to light as Grace, accompanied by strange little

Tilly, asks more questions and discovers more and more that the things that ring loudest in their ears are the things that are left unsaid.

The neat and skilful way that she incorporates the 1970s detail; Whimsies, Kay's Catalogue, Angel Delight and turning the TV on to 'warm up'. Her writing is honest, precise and quite irresistible. The suffocating and scorching unbearable heat of the summer adds intensity and depth to the story as the characters slowly realise that their darkest secrets, kept for many years, may be exposed. Their despair screams from the pages, getting louder towards the end as they realise that those who they assumed were sheep, may actually be goats.

'The Trouble with Goats and Sheep' is quite extraordinary. A triumph, a joy, a gift to the reader.

<http://randomthingsthroughmyletterbox.blogspot.co.uk/>

Sarah Harper

With heart-warming humour and keen observation, this fantastic story will stay with you long after the last page.

The oppressive, inescapable heat of the summer of 1976 forms the backdrop to this quirky mystery. Mrs Creasy has disappeared and in doing so has brought the history of The Avenue to the forefront of everyone's minds. As the summer swelters on, layers of the past are peeled away one by one to reveal the secrets each resident hopes to conceal. A missing child, a mysterious house fire, things which had been seen and could never be forgotten, no matter how hard they're pushed out of mind. Everyone has secrets but they're not necessarily what you would expect. Tenacious young Grace and the endearingly odd Tilly take it upon themselves to find God so that he can help them locate the missing Mrs Creasy. With their innocuous questions and innocent chats over penguins and lemonade, the young sleuths discover more than any adult ever could.

All of the characters were very well crafted but it was Grace and Tilly who really shone. I actually missed them when they didn't feature in a chapter and the subtle complexities of their relationship were perfect, bringing a lump to my throat on more than one occasion. The humour ('my Mum was having a little lie-down, she spent most of 1974 having a little lie-down') was keenly observed and the writing so evocative that you could feel the shirt sticking to your skin and smell the bubbling tarmac. The whole notion of goats and sheep will make you consider how people are perceived by society when they don't conform to the norm, and all in all this fantastic, heart-warming story will stay with you long after the last page.

Mary Chapman

From page one I loved the book; it's quirky, old fashioned, never boring, written beautifully and the voice of Grace very real and believable. I was totally engrossed with the story right to the end.

The book is descriptive and very amusing in parts, as when Grace says "My Mother spent most of 1974 having a little lie-down". Tilly is also a good character in the book, and her and Grace's story is quite touching. Tilly doesn't like eating in front of people - I couldn't work out that bit but presumed she had some sort of medical problem.

One sentence that especially amused me was, "It appeared that Jesus pulled in a much bigger crowd if he provided garibaldi's" - I really laughed out loud. Religion played a large part in the story, which never went over the top as some books do.

Mrs Morton was a good character and she was very important to Grace's wellbeing and taught her a lot of things she needed to know.

Marjorie Lacey

I loved this book and it's in depth look at The Avenue in the summer of 1976. It could have been your street, my street. We all have our list of characters living near us.

Joanna has written a charming book and given us an insight as to what goes on behind the closed doors. We felt despair, of them and their behaviour, frustrated by them but feeling sorry for them at the same time.

She gave us a new way to categorise them, as to who was a sheep and who was a goat. I shall be looking at my neighbours with new eyes. Oh! yes, I am a 'goat'. Which are you?

Gill Wilmott

I love the 1976 background to most of this book. I was around 12 years older than the two young "heroines" of this story in that year but obviously remember, mostly with affection, all the TV programmes, music, events, food etc. mentioned. 'The Sweeney', plans for The Silver Jubilee, Sherbet dips, Angel Delight to name but a few! In the midst of this is a "gentle" detection story, rather like a youngsters Miss Marple or Agatha Raisin, though I think it is so much better written than either of these.

Like them it's an easy read and the story is slow paced, but the everyday characters descriptions are superb. It's easy to imagine oneself in many of the thoughts, sayings and actions. Would I have "belonged" there? Would I have been a sheep or a goat? Indeed can you truly tell one from the other?

The author has a wonderful turn of phrase, sometimes you stop and read a passage again just for the joy of the wording. I wanted it to just go on and on.

For a book limited mostly to one street, and containing very little in the way of action, it kept me captivated.

Cathy Small

Grace and Tilly are trying to find Mrs Creasy who has gone missing and their only thought is that they need to find God first as he is everywhere.

It is quite a light hearted book with two girls trying to find out what happened to Mrs Creasy. *The story has several aspects from both the girls view and the neighbours view and as they ask around the hidden secrets start to reveal themselves showing vulnerability and the truth. The book does go through the story in a seemingly haphazard manner as you switch between the present and the past plus different characters in the story but it does all come to an ending that was expected but closes the book nicely.*

Kathy Howell

This is a really gentle, lovely read. *It is set in the long hot summer of 1976, but reflects on events during 1967.*

The story concerns a group of people who have all been neighbours for some time. They share a guilty secret which they are terrified will come into the open. The book begins with one lady from the street going missing. Everyone is worried about her, but even more so because they believe that she may know their secret and be about to tell the world.

Grace and her friend Tilly decide that they will look for the missing lady during their summer holidays because they think that the adults are hiding something. The street comes together when Tilly "finds" Jesus on a drainpipe and all sit guarding the picture during the week.

I really enjoyed reading this book and would recommend it to others.

Rebecca Cockeram

An absolutely delightful book about friendship, secrets and lies.

I have loved reading this book, from page one I was intrigued and hooked.

Part of the story is told through Grace's eyes with her best friend Tilly in tow. These characters reminded me of my youth, when me and my friends would plan adventures through the summer, though none as exciting as this. The author captures the children's inquisitive nature beautifully.

The rest of the story is told through the adult's point of view, which adds layers to the intrigue that keep you turning the pages.

I couldn't have loved this more.

Claire Nethercoat

Sitting down and reading this book has been great. Each time I have picked it up I have been immersed to another time, the writing has been in a style that has made this possible. I found the characters well described and easy to visualise.

Janet Lambert

What a refreshing and enjoyable trip down memory lane this book is. It was intended to be my Christmas read this year, but reading some very complimentary advance reviews made me long to pick it up sooner and I did, and I read it and I wasn't disappointed!

Set in the long hot school summer holidays of 1976, set to go down in history as "the hot one" and make all of us over 45 repeatedly mutter "I remember when summers WERE summers", even though there was really only the one like this.

In The Avenue, a normal street on an ordinary housing estate live 2 little girls, Grace and her friend Tilly, They don't quite fit in with the other kids but it doesn't matter because they are a formidable duo, full of imagination and ideas.

When a resident of the street a Mrs Creasy goes missing one day Grace decides that she and Tilly will solve the mystery of her disappearance by finding Jesus, who of course knows everything, and as they try, in their own inimitable way, to unravel what is behind the missing woman they uncover secrets and years of cover ups and hidden flaws amongst the residents of The Avenue.

Behind the veneer of suburban respectability lurks a hint of decay, like a vase of flowers on the brink of rotting.

Every resident is harbouring some kind of secret, every person has hidden vices and not so hidden prejudices.

When and if the girls do find Jesus will he bring everyone together or tear them apart?

What unfurls is a melodic story, written in prosaic thoughts and sentences of singular beauty, the voices of the 2 young girls echoing across the intervening years and making me feel their memories were mine.

With the flavour of angel delight, pick and mix and custard creams and the sound of Hilda Ogden on TV in the background we are transported back in time watching the mystery of a missing woman unravel everybody's secrets.

What the book is about at a deeper level is not fitting in and prejudice, friendship and betrayal.

Overall it's an utterly charming and delightful read with a mystery at heart that will have you wondering more than once whether someone is a gentle sheep following the flock innocently or a feisty goat head butting their way through life.

<http://beadyjansbooks.blogspot.co.uk/2015/12/the-trouble-with-goats-and-sheep-joanna.html>

Zarina

This is a quiet read that packs a powerful punch behind each thoughtful sentence, creating an eloquent and thought-provoking novel, which will undoubtedly stir up many conversations in 2016.

While a mystery novel on the surface, the real strength in 'The Trouble With Goats and Sheep' lies in the carefully crafted dissection of the cast of characters central to the story. There is an incredible sense of meaning behind each closed door and sneak glance from behind the curtains and this is portrayed exceptionally well by the choice of words of Cannon, creating beautiful and thoughtful prose that cuts through the mundane lives of the people on the Avenue.

And following the investigation of the disappearance of Mrs Creasy through the eyes of two naive yet inquisitive ten-year olds added to this feeling of wonder of something that could have so easily become droll.

To add to that, there is the intriguing questioning of religion and the brutal honesty in righteousness and even friendships from the two ten-year old protagonists that make this such a unique and enthralling read. Grace and Tilly are not only investigating the disappearance of a neighbour, or why number 11

is forbidden, but after hearing how God loves sheep and not the confused goats, they also try to categorise the people on the Avenue which makes for a fascinating insight into the human psyche and one I thoroughly enjoyed exploring.

'The Trouble With Goats and Sheep' isn't a fast-paced page-turner. Instead, it's a quiet read that packs a powerful punch behind each thoughtful sentence, creating an eloquent and thought-provoking novel, which will undoubtedly stir up many conversations in 2016.

<http://www.pagetostagereviews.com>

Carolyn Huckfield

Life behind the curtains in a typical suburban avenue can throw up secrets and lies that affect neighbours and friends alike in this funny and sometimes moving story.

It is told through the eyes of Grace and Tilly, two resourceful ten year old girls. When a neighbour disappears the girls set out to find out what has happened to her. We are in the hot summer of 1976 and the girls pretend to be brownies to get into neighbouring houses to start their investigations. There is also a darker mystery that also comes to light throughout this hot summer and it involves cover ups and deliberately forgetting what they have seen deeply impacts on some of the neighbours.

This is a perceptive novel that shows us the hypocrisy and prejudices that live in the residents of this avenue. There is a compassionate level to the narrative and humour in the portrayal of these neighbours. The lack of self-awareness in these characters is explored with humour and sensitivity. The portrayal of the girls is the highlight of this novel for me. Their innocent investigations into the disappearance of Mrs Creasey make this story more enjoyable than it should be.

Angela O'Donovan

A wonderful, wonderful read. I was hooked from the first page and taken back to that long hot summer...

If you read the blurb and have reservations about a story told through the eyes of two children – please don't be put off. Their age does not affect their voices in the story; merely reflect their thoughts and subsequent actions. The other characters have lots to contribute too during that summer of 1976.

What starts with the disappearance of Mrs Creasey turns into a mystery observed from many points of view – it is clear there are shared secrets,

misunderstandings, prejudices, fears and more within the community of 'The Avenue'.

The characters are believable and very much of their time. I remember that long hot summer and reading Joanna Cannon's exceptionally engaging first novel brought me back. Times were different, no internet, mobile phones; life was altogether slower and apparently, less complicated. However, human nature does not change much over time. When one Indian family moved into the avenue, it was shocking to read what some of the 'welcoming' neighbours said. Very friendly but so lacking in self-awareness it's stunning to read today and think it was 'ok' back then!

In the telling of that short period of time, we are allowed to get inside the minds of the residents and see how people are always influenced by others around them and allow pride and shame to filter their sense of selves.

I will not write any spoilers but the relief at the end of the story was palpable as the weather broke and life calmed down. Very well written, such a pleasure to read – in two sittings into the early hours. I'll be looking out for works by Joanna Cannon in future.

Manisha

*This is not the sort of book that I would normally pick to read in a hurry. However, **I really enjoyed it and would say it is one of the best books that I have read this year. I couldn't put it down.***

The book is set in a Midlands town and is mostly narrated by a 10 year old girl who goes looking for God with her best friend.

I will definitely recommend this book to friends and family who are looking for a good book to read.

Catherine Price

There are secrets and lies behind every door on The Avenue. And when Margaret Creasy disappears, every neighbour on the street sees it as a sign that their own murky past is about to be revealed.

Cleverly ratcheting up the tension by setting the action in the heatwave of 1976, this is an ingeniously paced novel, shot through with perfect period detail such as rooms with 'carpets the colour of cough mixture' and young Grace's collection of Whimsies, and love of Angel Delight. Some of the scenes, such as the arrival of an Indian family on the street, leave you uncertain whether to laugh or cringe at the archaic attitudes that were undoubtedly commonplace at the time.

But there is a much nastier thread of mass hysteria about to surface, as the residents try to place the blame for Mrs Creasy's disappearance on one of the more eccentric characters on The Avenue in order to cover up their own secrets. Will they succeed? Or will Grace and her friend Tilly find out the truth in time?

*This is **a wonderful debut novel**, rightly promoted as the discovery of one of the best new authors in recent years. Recommended.*

Rachael Anderson

An unusual story set in 1970s suburbia.

An intriguing novel, however, at times I found myself uncomfortable unravelling the secrets of its characters. Perhaps this is as a consequence of having grown up in the East Midlands in 1970s suburbia. There is so much in this novel that brings back strong memories and emotions. It is littered with 1970s trivia from songs, games and different types of food/confectionery to general habits.

The character of Grace, with her friend Tilly, act as amateur detectives over a hot summer. They attempt to find out about the disappearance of one of their neighbours, Margaret Creasy. Their detective work takes them in and of their neighbours' houses on 'The Avenue'. The majority of their neighbours view themselves as 'sheep' following the correct path and see those different to themselves as 'goats'. As we progress through the novel, it becomes clear that it is very difficult to work out who are the 'sheep' and 'goats'; in effect, the good and upright 'insiders', with the dishonest and corrupt 'outsiders'.

The reader is thrown back and forth between the present day of 1976 to some years before in 1967. From the start we are led to believe that the events of 1967 have a bearing on why Margaret Creasy has vanished.

An excellent debut novel which I would heartedly recommend. There is an equal balance here of humour, sorrow and injustice to pull at a wide range of emotions.