

LoveReading Reader reviews of What She Left by T.R. Richmond

Below are the complete reviews, written by LoveReading members.

Val Rowe

An intriguing and memorable debut novel. A complete page-turner written in a unique format.

When Alice Salmon tragically dies from an apparent drowning accident, her death impacts deeply upon her friends and family. However, only an academic Jeremy Cooke has the enduring commitment of attempting to assemble the fascinating life and death of the seemingly profound personality that is Alice.

A highly readable novel, T.R. Richmond skilfully and suggestively drip feeds tidbits of information helping the reader to gradually unpick events and relationships which have dominated Alice's life. As soon as we feel that we have unraveled one thread, another puzzle is set to tease us and to tempt us into considering another solution to the enigma.

One of the outstanding features of the book is its excellent use of a variety of genre such as blogs, diaries, letters and text messages to communicate the story-line. Through this we feel Alex's joys and sorrows even though she is already dead at the start of the novel.

My sole criticism would be that I found some of the sections overly-long but perhaps this is because I was desperate to discover the denouement.

Do read it!



Rachel Bridgeman - twitter @RACHELb75

It's a thriller, a modern, involving thriller but more than a 'did she fall, was she pushed, did she jump?' scenario, T.R Richmond's debut looks at the very modern process of grieving.

It has been a long time since I read a book so thoroughly that I sat in a bath, letting it go cold, because I did not want to lose a minutes reading time getting out. This is a debut, an outstanding thriller (of sorts) but literary more than contemporary, all concerning Alice Salmon, a girl who drowns and the people she leaves behind. Each individual narrative is from a person drawn into her life or related to her so it is made up of letters, blog posts, emails and diary entries. Alice herself talks from beyond the grave whilst in the 'now' a professor at her college is determined to gather every piece of her that is out in the world to keep her alive. The reasons for this are not obvious and what I enjoyed was not only the multiple narratives and discovering why people wanted to hold on to Alice, but also the examination of the modern way of grieving. Many thanks @Lovereading for this proof copy.

Jenny Heardman

A very different type of read, piecing together what really happened to Alice from the digital footprint she left behind.

Alice Salmon has been found, drowned, after a night out. 'What She Left' is a book of emails, tweets, blog posts and diary entries written by Alice and people who knew her in the years leading up to her death, and pieced together by one of her old Professors.

*The idea of this style of writing interested me but in reality I found it quite hard to follow as the story jumps back and forward in time and frequently changes characters. That said, I was keen to find out what really happened to Alice and the short chapters made me keep wanting to read just a bit more. **The story was good and well thought out and I didn't guess the ending** so that was another plus point **but the format just wasn't for me.***

Richard Hamlin

Alice Salmon is dead. That isn't in any doubt. The exact circumstances of how she died do however leave plenty of room for debate and that's where we find

ourselves at the beginning of 'What She Left'...

This is one of the most original and engrossing reads I've had the pleasure of reviewing for Lovereading. Written entirely in the form of extracts - diary entries, texts, blogs and memoirs - the key characters, along with Alice herself, piece together her history in the ten years preceding her death and in their subsequent reaction to it. Weaving everything together is Professor Jeremy Cooke, an academic fossil from Southampton University who once had something with Alice's mother and subsequently became fixated on the daughter too. Cooke is key to the narrative of the book, probing into Alice's past and gradually unearthing secrets and revelations as he delves deeper into her absorbing, chaotic and ultimately tragic life. Cooke is the antithesis of Alice - where she is bright and engaging, he is embittered and pitiful. Yet through Cooke and his interactions with Alice's former associates, Richmond weaves together a compelling and thoroughly enjoyable read.

The whole novel is a clever concept; there is not a single section of narrative in the traditional sense, but the story is stronger for this. Alice is an exuberant character, witty and at times subversive but with a overriding integrity and sense of right. She is the novel - savvy, edgy and compulsive. You sense that Richmond had fun creating her. This is a very current book - social media and modern day lifestyles seep from the pages. I liked it very much - in a genre that is hugely overcrowded and sometimes rather tedious, it offered something different, enjoyable and memorable. It could be a big success.

Angela O'Donovan

Caught my attention from the first page. What a striking way to portray a character - and what led to her mysterious death - by hearing from those around her, mostly in her last few years...

I was quickly caught up in Alice's story, or really the story leading up to her death. While Alice is at the centre of it all, there are other main players, and not always likeable characters. It was interesting that being a 'good' person or at least a likeable one, had no real bearing on how events developed.

Goodness/badness does seem to have a connection to likeability. It was more a mix of individuals who had strong views, not necessarily known to anyone else, which reflects on how we all live. We know only so much about each other, from what is revealed, our behaviour but we all have private thoughts - often best kept that way.

It's not giving anything away to say I didn't like Dr Cooke and I didn't feel much

empathy other than to Alice's boyfriend. There was a good sense of time and place and other than a couple of times I had to retrack a little, due to time frames, it all flowed very well. Perhaps a little too long.

I'd definitely recommend it as a good easy read.

Teresa O'Halloran

Just what happened to Alice Salmon that fateful night? We know she drowned, but was it an accident, suicide or MURDER?

T.R. Richmond takes us on a thoroughly modern journey of intrigue.

This was a very clever book, but it was almost too clever for me. While the plot was good and well thought out, the book could use some further editing as I found it over long and tedious at times. There were days when I just did not want to pick it up.

The use of social media via blogging and twitter did not work for me, it was just too modern, and I found the constant back and forth between time confusing.

The characters were all unpleasant including Alice. I would have preferred at least one character I could like in order to enjoy the book.

I'm sure many readers will love the style but it just wasn't for me.

Tessa Olson

Are you really who you say you are?

This book fascinated me from the first few pages, because in spite of the story which was gripping in itself, it got me thinking. Who really knows me and what would my obituary say?

The main character Alice is a puzzle because she never quite appears to be on the level. The reader is left feeling slightly mistrustful of her throughout the book. The other characters add to a general feeling of things that are creepy and sinister.

The ending for me was a bit trite, maybe rushed, after the general pace of the story and the questions raised in my mind about the other characters. So intertwined and grubby!

However overall the book engaged me and I would recommend it as thought provoking at the very least. How well do you ever know a person? What would

you want your legacy to be?

It is well written and for me provided a surprisingly pleasant break from the types of books that I have been reading of late.

Sarah Harper

A compilation of texts, blogs, letters and personal accounts, this totally unique whodunit holds its secrets close to its chest until the bitter end and sticks in your mind long after.

'What She Left' was unlike anything I've ever read before. A totally unique whodunit. A compilation of texts, blogs, letters and personal accounts lead us through the life of murdered journalist Alice Salmon in the years preceding and following her death. The structure of the novel is strange, with entries jumping around wildly in time. We move from 2009 diary entries, to 2012 letters, to 2004 emails and back again. I must admit that initially I found it all exceptionally confusing as I tried to establish some sort of order to the events, however once I let this go and allowed the entries to carry me through the unfolding story, it all made sense and the need to focus on the specific dates fell away. When I was at my most muddled I didn't think that I would be able to persevere to the end but I'm very glad that I did. The characters and the story evolve and leave you with a really different style of novel which holds its secrets close to its chest until the bitter end and sticks in your mind long after. A really different read which, despite my earlier misgivings, I would happily recommend.

Jennifer Stoddart

I really enjoyed this book, it was very original and really clever. I liked the style, as we learn about Alice not just from her own voice but from the perspective of those who knew her. At times I found it hard to keep track of all the characters but this is not something I would castigate the author for. If you are looking for an engrossing thriller with a difference then this book comes highly recommended! I would like to thank Lovereading and the publisher for allowing me to read this book.

Edel Waugh

'What She Left' is the story about a young woman called Alice Salmon, and we

know from the beginning that she died from drowning. We get to see Alice when she was alive through her journal entries, her relationships, and online presence so we do get to know quite a bit about her but this story only gives us little hints at a time about what was going on, enticing me to keep turning the pages well past my bed time. The story goes back and forth between when she was alive and after she died, we learn about those who she was close to, things she liked to do, and they all begin to paint a picture of Alice. Reading this feels like snooping with a mystery that is just going to get darker and darker and so the tension builds nicely making this hard to put down. I found Jeremy a less than likeable character although reading Jeremy and Elizabeth's (Alice's mother) emails back and forth to each other I found it easier to understand why he took it upon himself to write about this young journalist who had a great future ahead of her even if it made me feel uneasy. **This is for those who enjoy a page turner with plenty of mystery that will leave you feeling unsettled about people's online presence and what can be left behind.**

<http://www.edelwaugh.blogspot.com>

Bethany Dimmock - Twitter: @BethanyAmber94

Richmond successfully adds a missing piece to the crime bookshelf by using an intriguing and current narrative style. I loved it.

'What She Left' captures what twenty-five year old journalist Alice Salmon left behind after she drowned in Southampton's river; family, friends, speculation, and ultimately, her past.

Richmond has a clear talent for crime writing and forms a gripping tale from a unique and original perspective, which manages to tell more than just Alice's story, but the stories of those close (and not so close!) to her.

Forget the detectives; this impressive story is told through the likes of letters, emails, newspaper articles and even tweets, compiled by the obsessive and somewhat suspicious Professor Jeremy Cooke. This makes the novel so much more than words on a page, bringing it to life as a modern crime thriller.

This is an undoubtedly clever debut, which is a superb read from start to finish. Add this to your 'must read' list for 2015.

Janice Maxwell

The story grew on me as I got further into it. Going backward and

forward with emails, letters etc was confusing and in the end I ignored the dates and was able to work it out from the content.

*At the end I still don't know 'What She Left' so that was disappointing. **It was ok.***

Gill Wilmott

I enjoyed this book as a “one off”, but I don’t think I would wish to read any quantity of stories in this format. Maybe it’s because of my “maturity”. This is a book “of its time” made up of social media writings, emails and blogs. Reading it left me wondering if I would have wanted such instant communication in the rawer emotional days of my youth. Saying things on the spur of the moment does not always pay, and presuming someone has always received your communications is another downfall illustrated by this book.

Even though the author never describes his characters in the conventional way we get to paint very clear pictures of them all, not just Alice, through the eyes and ears of others, so it is very cleverly written. Small revelations throughout the book, and a bigger one at the end, keep the reader interested too.

*Unfortunately it was not in chronological order and I had to make sure I put each piece in context - i.e. how long before or after Alice’s death - before I read it. However **all in all an intriguing debut book by Mr. Richmond.***

Nicola Foster

The less divulged about this compelling book, the better, at least in my opinion. This is the sort of story that demands to be unravelled piece by piece...

I thoroughly enjoyed this well-constructed novel of grief, love and obsession. Cleverly told both in the here and now via a slew of very ‘current’ feeling mediums including those of diaries, letters, blogs, tweets and emails, we witness the aftermath of a devastating and unexpected death and the impact it has on those left behind. The question is, was Alice Salmon’s death really accidental... or was there something more sinister going on?

The less divulged about this compelling book, the better, at least in my opinion. This is the sort of story that demands to be unravelled piece by piece; the author manages to ever-so-satisfyingly drop subtle clues about Alice’s death and events leading up to it, at the same time as allowing the reader to really get to know her. By the time the story draws to a (not all too satisfying admittedly)

conclusion, like those who loved her, you too grieve for her loss, the waste of her life and all her potential.

'What She Left' is a fascinating, tightly-plotted debut with some well-developed characters, artfully drawn multiple narratives and a not very predictable dénouement. I for one was certainly kept guessing as to the truth behind Alice's death, though I have to say I did feel a bit let-down by what was unveiled. I also appreciated how this book could have been maudlin, yet actually wasn't anywhere near as bleak as I had anticipated, due to its fast pace and easy ability to slip between the past and present. The ways in which people grieve are very different and I think this novel captured the essence of that very well.

I'd recommend this book to anyone looking for a page-turning, suspenseful read; it certainly had me hooked.

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