

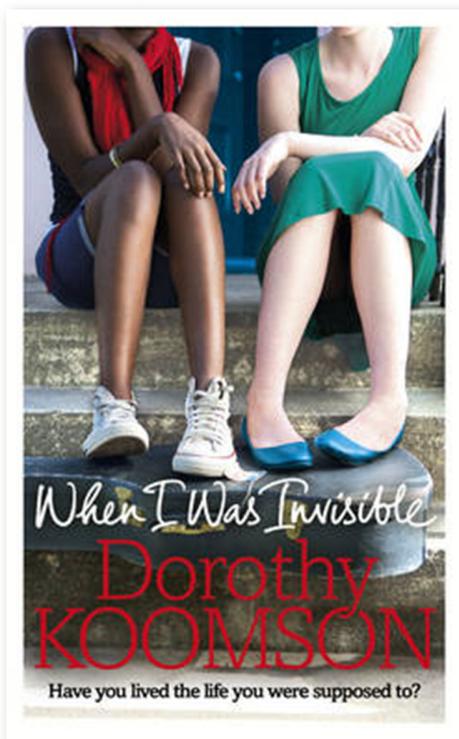


Helping you choose
your next book

Lovereading Reader reviews of **When I Was Invisible** By Dorothy Koomson



Below are the complete reviews, written by Lovereading members.



Vikki Patis

As a rule, I tend to struggle with modern fiction. I like to slip into books, away from the world we live in, and so when I read about Facebook or iPods, I cringe a little bit. Some authors really struggle to recreate the modern world in fiction, but not Koomson. It's as if she captures everything as she goes along, like a photographer, and manages to turn it into a story into which any of us could slide. If I had to use two words to describe Koomson's books, they would be 'haunting' and 'real'.

Veronica Harper and Veronika Harper - known as Roni and Nika respectively - have more in common than their name. They sit together at school, start attending

ballet lessons together, and then experience a horrific experience together, which splits them apart. Their lives may seem as different as they could be, but Roni and Nika are bound by the horrors inflicted upon them when they were children, and, to make things right, they have to find each other again.

Koomson always tackles current issues, and 'When I Was Invisible' is no different. Sexual assault, homelessness, abuse... She doesn't shy away from anything, and quite right, too. Such issues affect us all, and reading about how Koomson's characters overcome their fears is powerful; it can inspire those of us who have gone through similar things to do the same. 'When I Was Invisible' is, ultimately, a story of friendship and kindness to oneself. Learning to forgive

ourselves is one of the hardest things we can ever do, but it is absolutely necessary if we are to ever move forward after trauma. This is a lesson I've learnt myself, and I imagine many others can say the same. **There are pieces of us hidden between the lines of Koomson's stories; that's what makes them so beautiful, and so tragic. We turn to fiction to escape, but in Koomson's work, we find ourselves.**

<https://dracarya.wordpress.com/2016/04/12/when-i-was-invisible-by-dorothy-koomson/>.

Ann Peet

Immersive and compelling, emotionally harrowing and gripping.

This is a really powerful and compelling novel that you will find hard to put down.

In 1988 two eight year-old girls with almost identical names meet and, partly through their shared love of ballet dancing, become best friends. The main narrative is set in the present day when Veronika (Nika) and Veronica (Roni) are trying to come to terms with what happened to them in the past. The story of these experiences, how one betrayed the other and how this led them both to try to find escapes where they became invisible to society is gradually revealed in flashbacks.

This is one of the most affecting and harrowing stories I have read. The way in which their lives were shaped by their childhood experiences is both horrifying and deeply moving. At times it is so painful that it is difficult to go on reading but the quality of the writing and the need to find out what happens will keep you hooked.

Tanya Thurling

Well I don't really know where to start with this book. What. A. Book!

*I can't really say what I want to say without giving away the entire book but what I will say is **Dorothy Koomson takes a massive, sensitive subject, something that would be every girl, daughter, wife's very worst nightmare and takes you on its journey, from the very start.** You will experience so many emotions your head will be spinning. I spun from deeply sympathetic to extreme anger to disgust to unbelievable sorrow.*

You'll follow the stories of Veronika and Veronica Harper. Two best friends,

each girl has a similar story and it impacts their lives in quite different ways. Both equally as tragic but I think it was Nika's story that impacted on me the most. It certainly gave me a bigger insight and understanding of living on the streets. I keep wanting to say how awful the story was but not in a 'really bad book' way. The situation was awful but Dorothy handled it amazingly. Her writing is beautiful and the fact that she made me feel all the emotions with the characters speaks for itself.

*I can't say much more without giving things away but read it for yourself. Just **be prepared for an emotional rollercoaster.***

Angie Rhodes

London 1989 and two young school girls become best friends. These girls apart from being the same age, have identical names, the only difference is the spelling. Both have dreams of being Ballet Dancers, but life can be cruel and you don't always get what you dream of.

Something happened, something bad, something to make both girls turn away from the friendship they had, something that makes them "Invisible". Years later the time has come to meet and put the wrong right. Will their friendship, re surface after so much time apart? Will they be stronger enough for the fall out that it will leave?

Just be ready to shed some tears, and burn the tea as you keep reading.

Joy Bosworth

This starts as a quite interesting book, and quickly develops into an addictive tale that I hated to put down.

It's the little things that are so effective... An unexpected hug from a relative thought not to even care about the recipient, or the very real detail when a formerly homeless person revels in the ability to dry soap and facecloth rather than cramming back into storage whilst still wet. Or the hardly noticed effect that leaves the same person reluctant to invite people over the new threshold.

As a simple story of two friends who attend the same ballet classes the events that shape their lives when there are pretty predictable. But how those repercussions echo over the years are frightening. That a sense of not being worthy permeates lives lived in the future and also that other factors interplay

with the initial “event” ricochet over decades.

That there is an honour amongst thieves is accepted, but the other etiquette of living on the streets is eye-opening. However, the overall message is the devastating harm that parents can do.

What could have been a grimy, sordid tale is so well written that it is never salacious, it merely serves to illuminate the characters and give us a better understanding of how the adults of today are shaped by events of the 1980s. They are real, understandable people who exist among others who, by a glance or turn of the head, can make or mar the future.

Nicola Kingswell

A heart-breaking emotionally charged story of two friends stolen childhoods.

Veronika (Nika) Harper and Veronica (Roni) Harper become best friends through an almost identical name and a shared passion for ballet. Life throws both girls complete curve balls so that 25 years after first meeting, neither are living the lives they thought they would be. When they meet again, Roni is determined to right the wrongs dealt to them both.

Dorothy Koomson deals with so many difficult topics in this book; incest, rape, child abuse, domestic abuse, homelessness, drug abuse, violence, prostitution, religion, family, friendship, and love. It almost feels like a never ending run of doom and gloom, but somehow it isn't. Dorothy Koomson should be commended on the sheer mountain of research that must have gone into this book.

This is a fantastic story of the journeys of both Nika and Roni from childhood to adulthood. It is told from the point of view of both girls, and in present day and flash back format. I liked how everything was mixed up and found it easy to follow.

This was a wonderful book. Difficult to read in some places, shocking and emotive. It stays with you long after the final page is read.

Phyllippa Smithson

I found this a disjointed book to read, way too many flashbacks making it difficult to care if Koomson answers her question: ‘Have you lived the life you were supposed to?’

The two lead characters only differ in name by a letter, Veronika Harper and then there is Veronica Harper. They are the very best of friend and dream of becoming ballet dancers. Both get a break as children at the local dancing school when they are selected for personal tuition.

Fast forward to their current lives and the friendship no longer exists. What broke the friendship and what led the two of them to live remarkably different, unforeseen and desperate lives is slowly and, thanks to the writing style which abruptly shifts between periods in their childhood, their twenties and now their mid-30s, frustratingly revealed.

Koomson gets us there in the end but found it a draining experience. Clever but still draining.

Katie Wright

Another strong offering from Dorothy Koomson centred around the friendship of two young girls.

Veronica Harper (Roni) & Veronika Harper (Nika) are best friends bound by a love of dance and a devastating secret which will change their lives forever. In 'When I Was Invisible,' we follow the lives of the two Veronica's from young girls into adulthood and see how one event defines their future paths.

Dorothy Koomson has written another captivating novel, with a gripping story dealing sensitively with a range of issues including abuse and homelessness. Whilst this isn't my favourite Koomson book, it stands up well alongside her other work.

Sarah Musk

An intense book - often hard hitting - about friendship and betrayal on several levels. Sometimes difficult to read but well worth it in the end.

This is a well written book but it is very sombre and quite depressing at times. I sometimes wondered how much misery I could take.

The story centres around two best friends called Veronica. As young girls they both loved ballet and were abused by their teacher. The story goes back and forth between three time periods - when they were teenagers, in their twenties and now in the present day. Dorothy Koomson very cleverly interweaves the different periods in their life and ensures the reader does not lose track of the

story.

The book can be very intense but it is a heartbreaking subject to write about and the sorrow you feel for their lost youth is very real. The relationship they both had with their parents is almost a continuation of the abuse they suffered at the hands of their teacher. Both parents failed in their duty to protect their daughters and that is almost more difficult to read about than the sexual abuse.

Dorothy Koomson is a fine writer who faces challenging stories full on and after reading her books you are certainly a lot wiser about the dark side of life and human nature than before. I would recommend the book needs to be read to remind us about the power of friendship and the ability of human beings to overcome terrible experiences in their young lives.

Edel Waugh

*This is a story about two women who originally met at school. They have one very unusual thing in common, the very same name, but they go by Roni and Nika. The story is an interesting one from the curious introduction of these two females to fast forward many years and both of their lives are very different. We learn early on something happened between the two women but we do not learn what until much later, I tried to guess judging by where they were in their lives in the present tense but I did not see it coming. **This is an emotional read, when I finished the last page it felt like a big hole had been left inside me and it's rare a book will do that to me.** The story covered topics like friendship, domestic abuse, homelessness and survival, and at the centre are these two friends with a unique bond that could not be broken. I recommend this to everyone! Breathtaking!*

www.edelwaugh.blogspot.co.uk Twitter: @littlebookfairy

Laura Ayling

'When I Was Invisible' was powerful and captivating, telling a story of two girls trying to find their way in life after being hurt and betrayed.

Veronica Harper and Veronika Harper, Roni and Nika respectively, met at school and then joined the same ballet class, we are thrown right into this innocent world of big dreams, love and friendship at the start of the novel.

Very quickly it becomes clear that something happened between the girls in

their teens that pushed them apart, right up until the end of the book although I had my suspicions, we were never really told and even then there was more going on that we were lead to believe.

The book alternates between both Roni and Nika, although I felt Nika had a much bigger storyline, and within their narratives we were thrown between the present day, their childhood/teens and what happened in the many years that passed and how they became a nun and minor celebrity.

This is my first novel by Dorothy Koomson, and although there was one bit in the middle where I felt like I was re-reading the complete first half of the book, as a whole - it had me gripped, Dorothy has a wonderful way of story telling despite some of the plot lines being very raw and dark.

'When I Was Invisible' was powerful and captivating, telling a story of two girls trying to find their way in life after being hurt and betrayed.

www.lozzasbookcorner.blogspot.co.uk

Humaira Kauser

Quick and unique read.

*A great book that I will remember for a while to come. I liked this book. It wasn't my usual type of book that I would read but it was excellent nonetheless. **I liked the diversity, something that isn't carried out nearly enough in a lot of books. I also loved the way it was written; it was great and engaging!***

https://www.instagram.com/cookie_bookie/

Vicky-Leigh Sayer

'When I was Invisible' is a gritty, emotional and beautifully written novel about love, loss, friendship, heartache and the ultimate betrayal of trust.

Veronica Harper (Roni) knows instantly that she is going to be best friends with Veronika (Nika) Harper when they meet at school. They are bound together not only through their names, but also their love of ballet.

Both are destined to be professional dancers.

Both are torn apart by the actions of someone close to them, tearing their friendship apart in the process.

In the present day their lives could not be more different, Roni has found God and is a former Nun, whilst Nika has been a minor celebrity and is now a cleaner in an upscale hotel. Their paths are destined to cross again and some might say that fate has drawn them back together.

But can either of them truly forget the past in order to truly live in the present?

'When I was Invisible' is a gritty, emotional and beautifully written novel about love, loss, friendship, heartache and the ultimate betrayal of trust.

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

Nicola Underwood

A really great insight into living with abuse.

'When I Was Invisible' is a novel written from the perspective of two main characters, both with very similar names who were best friends as children. The timeline jumps around but is set between 1988 and the present day. The book is well written and opens a window into living with different forms of abuse.

*There is not explicit detail into the exact happenings but enough to give you a picture, which I prefer. I can't cope with books which have all the gory details when it comes to abuse and this isn't one of those. **This book was very hard to put down and overall an enjoyable, if sad, read.***

Joan Sidwell

A page turner, very moving and beautifully written, handling difficult subjects in a sensitive manner.

Drawing you in from the very beginning, what compels Nika to go into a Birmingham police station and report an attempted murder? Why does her friend Roni leave her life as a nun and return to her family home after so many years?

Nika and Roni meet as children at school and as well as their names being the same they discover a shared love of ballet. After several years their friendship suddenly ends and their lives take a dramatic turn. Nika runs away several times through the intervening years, ending up homeless and living on the streets and Roni, in turn, becomes a nun. After leaving the convent Roni wants to find Nika, who is building a new life in Brighton, to make amends for her betrayal of their friendship.

Told partly in flashback, going back from the present day to various points over the last 25 years, slowly building up a picture of what has happened to them both as a result of events in their childhood and beyond, this book is complex and intriguing.

Although the topics are quite different there are some similarities to the dynamics of Dorothy Koomson's recent books. The main characters, particularly Nika, who is strong and deeply principled, are very well portrayed. The story is slow burning at first, dealing with difficult subjects in a sensitive manner and at times it is shocking and unbearably sad, gaining pace towards the end. It is still a page turner though, very moving and beautifully written.

Cheryl Kinney

Gripping Emotional Read.

I have read most of Dorothy Koomson's books and I find each other just gets better and better. This is by far my favourite of hers I have read.

She always has strong female characters and this is definitely the case in this novel.

The book covers some emotional topics that at times are difficult to imagine however they are written in a sensitive manor that really convey the distress and emotions of the characters.

Nika and Roni are both good characters that the reader can relate to, however both of their mothers are horrible people who made me feel really frustrated!

What both the women go through is horrible and how they cope and come through it in the end is amazing.

This is such a well written novel that really draws the reader in and keeps them hooked.

Would recommend this book 100%

Twitter @cheryl_bookworm

Margaret Madden

A tale of fractured friendship and two lives which headed in different directions.

Dorothy Koomson begins this novel in the late 1980s, bringing the music and

fashion of the time to life, as she introduces Veronika and Veronica. Like many young girls, they find friendship through their mutual love of ballet, where they dream of Swan Lake, The Nutcracker and standing ovations. While their feet suffer from the strenuous training and the competition to find a principle ballerina begins, their classes begin to lose their appeal and the girls struggle to end their relationship with ballet. Secrets begin to unravel and their closeness becomes toxic. They head down different paths and lose contact. The novel has different time frames, slotted in no particular order, and the reader is taken on a disjointed journey with the two protagonists. The reason for the girl's fractured friendship becomes apparent towards the end of the book, and the overall story becomes clearer.

I struggled with a few small issues. Firstly the girls names (Veronika and Veronica are shortened to Nika and Roni). I kept confusing them when the chapters split into separate narratives and had to keep reading back to see which girl I was reading about. I also felt the book was a little too long. The first two thirds were slow-going and while I understand the need to explain how the characters ended up in their current situations, I think Nika's story justified the extended background while Roni's just dragged on too much. The disjointed time frames also caused some confusion. In saying that, I enjoyed the book. As always, the author's writing is fluid and gentle, while her talent for writing about friendship is still going strong.

<http://www.bleachhouselibrary.ie>

Follow Margaret on Twitter: @margaretbmadden

Yvonne Richardson

*This is the first book by Dorothy Koomson and I am happy to say it won't be the last. She has a style in her writing that keeps the pages turning. **Beautifully written and such a heartfelt tale of friendship and betrayals that life throws at you.** The two main characters were such that you really could feel their troubles and want justice for them both. **Dorothy Koomson is a very talented writer that leaves you looking for her next book.***

Jan Kirkcaldy

***Rather intriguing from the outset this story of “name twins” from their first meeting in school in 1988 to the present day promised something different and interesting.** It was, to a certain extent. Both*

girls called Veronika / Veronica Harper known as Nika and Roni led very different lives from their late teens and ultimately had no contact with one another from that time. The unknown reason for this was what kept the book alive and made me follow it until the end as it was obviously meant to do. Lots of hints but nothing revealed for a very long time. Told in a series of individual chapter segments chronicling happenings in their lives during their period apart, we discovered one became a nun and the other became tabloid fodder among other dubious things. One had a guilty conscience, the other was resigned to her fate whatever that might be. So there is plenty to focus on. Unfortunately I found it hard to empathise with either.

There was the now seeming obligatory historic child abuse, the drugs scene, parental neglect and even a celebrity footballer in the mix plus the occasional pleasanter more normal people too. I did enjoy it despite having to check at the start of virtually every chapter to see which of the Victoria's I was reading about. This dodging backwards and forwards in place and time is very fashionable in recent books but it can be very irritating. If you put up with that it is well worth reading if only to get to the ultimate, fairy satisfying conclusion.