



Darkness on the Edge of Town

Jessie Cole

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My dad, he collects broken things ... Where other people see junk he sees potential ... My dad collects broken people too ... Vincent is nearly forty years old, with little to show for his life except his precious sixteen-year-old daughter, Gemma: sensitive, insightful and wise beyond her years. When a stranger crashes her car outside Vincent and Gemma's bush home, their lives take a dramatic turn. In an effort to help the stranded woman, father and daughter are drawn into a world of unexpected and life-changing consequences. DARKNESS ON THE EDGE OF TOWN is a haunting tale that beguiles the reader with its deceptively simple prose, its gripping and unrelenting tensions, and its disturbing yet tender observations.

Darkness on the Edge of Town Details

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Author : Jessie Cole

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From Reader Review Darkness on the Edge of Town for online ebook

Michelle says

Review coming soon...ish. I didn't intend to read this book until I was ready to review it - I just started and couldn't stop. More later.

Julie says

4*

Sharon Marchingo says

Darkness on the Edge of Town

By Jessie Cole

Darkness on the Edge of Town is the latest book in review for the Crusoe Community Book Club. It is a page turner that I read in three and a half hours such was the gripping nature of the story. I was hooked from the first page until the last such was the power of the writing.

Basically the book is about single Dad, Vincent, his daughter Gem and Rachel the victim of a car crash who Vincent finds at his drive way. The setting is in a small northern New South Wales town where Vincent lives a quiet life, collecting bits and pieces from the tip, mending broken things and coaching the junior football team. His wife took off years ago and left him to raise his wise step daughter Gem, who is in the midst of the angst teenage years. He has moved from relationship to relationship and is currently with one of the local women who he finds to be demanding and paranoid. His is just plodding along in life. All this changes when he finds Rachel holding her dead baby near his driveway. He manages to get her to hospital but like a lost soul who bonds to the first person who shows kindness, she returns to his house and becomes very dependent on him as she deals with her heartbreaking grief. The scene of her in the clothing store looking at baby clothes and collapsing had me sobbing.

The story unveils the domestic abuse that she was running away from and her finding connections with her past. It is about two lonely people of mismatched ages who find love and solace with one another and of Gem's coming of age and her disappointing relationship with her mother.

The writing is simple but truly Australian and Vincent's knockabout gentle nature is captured perfectly as he and Gem tell their sides of the story. This is excellent debut novel and a highly recommended read.

Chris Waterford says

A lovely rich story with good, but flawed characters. An easy read---a good writer---a very believable romance plus a coming of age story.

Lisa Walker says

A crashed car on a country road, a fragile young woman and man who collects broken things... These are the elements which introduce Jessie Cole's debut novel, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

Vincent is something of a drifter, a handyman on the cusp of forty, unpolished, but tender. From the moment he stops to help the young woman he finds sitting beside her crashed car, his life takes a new direction.

Rachel, brittle and grieving, returns to Vincent's house and a strange and intense relationship develops between them.

Vincent's daughter Gemma is sixteen, and entering the unknown land of male and female relationships. She wonders how she can spend all night talking to a boy and then, 'at school he acted like he'd never seen me before...' Gemma has watched Vincent move from woman to woman in the town, always choosing ones with, 'a half-crazy edge'. 'I used to wonder what it was about my dad that attracts these women... But lately I'm thinking maybe I should be worried about what it is that he needs from them.' Gemma watches with apprehension as the dynamic between Vincent and Rachel changes.

The story is told from the alternate voices of father and daughter. Both voices are strong, distinct and totally authentic. There are some beautiful moments between Gemma and her father such as when Vincent tries to tell her how he feels about Rachel. '...I can never explain it, and the more I'd try the weirder it'd sound.' All three characters struggle to communicate their feelings - the gaps between what they say and what they feel ring loudly.

Set in an isolated valley in northern New South Wales, the novel explores themes of masculinity and sexuality, communication and miscommunication. In the style of writers like Tim Winton, it is a tense and gripping portrayal of the current that lies beneath relationships in the smallest of towns.

The theme of male violence also pervades the book. Vincent, though compassionate and principled, is quick to anger. I read the book with a knot of apprehension which grew as the story progressed. But what touched me most was its quality of transience. As Vincent reflects, lying next to Rachel, 'I lay there, still and quiet, knowing that nothing lasts forever, but sort of hoping that it could.'

This is a novel you'll read quickly and then wish you'd read slowly because you don't want it to end.

Lisa says

I have discovered a beautiful new Aussie author, thanks to Angela Meyer's Literary Minded blog. *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is an emotionally gripping tale that seduced me away from the IFFP titles I'm supposed to be reading, one of those books that you pick up just to have 'a quick look', and soon find yourself so utterly absorbed that all thoughts of the other book are entirely forgotten.

It begins with Vincent's discovery of a young girl beside the road. She has crashed the car and is cradling a baby.

Vincent is nearly forty, and he's been around a bit with women. A single parent, he has a 16-year-old daughter called Gemma at home and although his place is a bit of shambles and he has a dead-end job, he's not doing a bad job of bringing her up. He and Gemma narrate the story of this young woman's fragile state and how he comes to give her shelter when she needs it. There are complex moral issues that arise out of his growing affection for the emotionally disturbed woman whose age is not revealed until late in the tale.

To read the rest of my review please visit <http://anzlitlovers.com/2013/03/28/da...>

Lauren Tupper says

What a sad novel. I don't even know what to think about it. I think haunting is a good word.

The characters were flawed and well written; the tale was simple but there was something about it that was very compelling.

A young woman loses her child in a car accident, and a man and his daughter are drawn into her tragic world.

Theresa says

A good novel... very Australian...

Jess says

This book dealt with incredibly real, raw and emotionally disturbing issues in a very authentic way. I didn't intend to read this book, I actually didn't even want to read this book. However once I had started, I found I couldn't stop. I guess that says something about the writers ability to grab you and pull you into the story. I didn't find it to be a thriller or a crime novel in the traditional sense, however there is a strong undercurrent of violence throughout the book, almost subtle at times, that will leave you feeling quite tense and keep you turning those pages.

Bree T says

Vincent collects broken things. Living up on a remote hill with his teenage stepdaughter Gemma, he trawls tips for furniture and appliances for his house, collecting far more than he could ever need, cluttering up the small house. They don't have much, but together they get by.

Vince doesn't just collect broken things, he seems drawn to broken people as well. Wherever he goes, drama tends to follow and he doesn't know quite how he ended up in these situations. He married Gemma's mother when she was just 2 and when she took off years later, Gemma stayed with Vince. Since then Vince has drifted in and out of relationships with broken women.

He arrives home one night and finds Rachel on his property, distressed and cradling a baby. She has crashed her car on a dangerous bend in the road just near his house and she's in a state. He looks after her, patching her up best he can, calling the ambulance for the baby. When they arrive and take them both away, Vince thinks that's probably the last of it. He's done his good deed.

But then Rachel turns up at his house, having escaped from the hospital and walked all the way out there. She's brittle and grieving and for some reason she seems to have chosen Vince as a shelter, a place where she feels safe. Gently, Vince is able to tease Rachel's story out in small increments, a tragic tale that stirs

within him a protectiveness. Despite his best efforts of getting Rachel the treatment she needs for her injuries, getting her the help she needs for her situation, Rachel always seems to find her way back to Vince.

Darkness On The Edge Of Town starts with a bang, Vincent, an almost-40 country sort of bloke arriving home and finding a car has gone off the road and crashed near his isolated property. He finds Rachel, cradling her 9wk old baby and it's clear to Vincent from first glance that things aren't at all okay with the baby. Rachel is in a state of shock but it isn't until later that it becomes apparent that Rachel is in shock from much more than just her accident and subsequent loss.

I was hooked on this story from the first few words – the narrative is split between Vince and his young stepdaughter (who is really more than that), a 16yo girl wise and mature beyond her years. Vince is the only father she has ever known and she chose to stay with him when he and her mother split up and the two of them have a close and somewhat unusual relationship. Gemma accepts her father's ways of finding and trying to fix broken things, perhaps she even shares it. But she knows that Rachel, when she reappears in their lives, is going to change things. You can see her apprehension, her hesitance. She's torn between feeling sorry for Rachel, wanting to help her, wanting to help fix her as well, and perhaps trying to protect herself and her father from what Rachel will bring into their lives, a type of chaos from which there will be consequences.

This is a book strongly driven by character and relationships. Vince is rough around the edges but also gentle. I couldn't help but sympathise with him because he had such good intentions but he was really quite ill equipped emotionally to care for Rachel after what she had been through. That's no slight on Vince – as Rachel's tragic story unfolds, it's clear that she's quite scarred and damaged by where her life has led her and Vince's best attempts are not going to be enough to help her. As a mother I also felt deeply for Rachel, the way in which she had this child did not change the depth of her grief for him when he was then lost to her and some of the scenes where Rachel finally has to accept that little Frankie is gone are utterly heartbreaking in their honest simplicity.

The character of Gemma is so beautifully written – a 16yo girl living only with her father. Her mother has very little to do with her now and you can tell from her brief appearance in this book that even though Gemma has come to realise exactly what her mother is, her visits cause her pain because they force her to re-confront this every single time. She's at a stage where she probably desperately needs a mother to talk to about the things she's going with at school, with boys, but all she has is Vince and although the two of them do have a lovely bond, it's not the same. I felt for Gemma so much, she seemed very lost at times in this novel and at others she was such an amazing tower of strength.

Darkness On The Edge Of Town is a very promising debut from a truly talented young Australian woman writer and I very much look forward to what Jessie Cole has in store for readers.

Moses Kilolo says

This is perhaps the most readable book I have come across all year. The story of a father and a daughter, and the woman who crashes a car close to their home, its a gripping story that exposes the different aspects of relationships and how chance encounters can significantly alter the course of lives. Its that kind of book you curl up with, and forget the world for a while, and when its done you wish you could start all over again, experience it afresh.

Janine says

*This review contains spoilers

For me this book read more like a YA novel than an adult thriller. I also found that there wasn't enough tension to sustain my interest. Much of the book is taken up with Vincent dressing and undressing Rachel and tending to her leaking breasts. Definitely TMI.

Rachel is a cipher of a character, making it hard to feel much for her besides pity. She's just lost her baby so obviously she's severely traumatised but the more we learn about her the more of a cipher she becomes. She is the ultimate victim in many ways as she lost her mother when she was 19 and ended up being preyed upon by a creepy neighbour who fathers her child then beats her up. If she was younger this might have been more believable but it's just hard to accept that a 19 year old could be that easily manipulated. She is described repeatedly as beautiful throughout the book, which is very predictable. On top of this she is an innocent who has only ever slept with one man (creepy neighbour guy), allowing Vincent to step in and show her what real lovin' all about.

This seems a bit too close to a male fantasy to me or a female rescue/daddy fantasy. This book would have been much stronger if Rachel had some substance to her and was running from an abusive boyfriend instead of being almost a total passive victim. Given her experiences with CNG I found it hard to believe she'd jump straight into the arms of a strange older man and snuggle up with him in his bed. After freaking out that CNG was going to track her down at a women's shelter she is then quite content to stay at Vincent's house when half the town knows she's there and CNG is running around trying to find her.

The only explanation given for this large hole in the plot is that people in town don't talk to strangers and give things away. Well, I live in a small town and I can assure you it doesn't work like that. Vincent is also so sure CNG won't turn up at the house because it's "hard to find" his place. It is therefore really surprising when he does show up. The "shocking" climax comes way too late in the piece to be very exciting. Afterwards Vincent has a violent altercation with psycho Marie, his scorned ex and her latest squeeze, for giving CNG directions to his house. Rachel then does what any woman who has led a sheltered life and been the victim of male violence would do: she jumps into the first semi-trailer that comes along and disappears into the night. Really???

Michael says

Jessie Cole's debut novel *Darkness On the Edge Of Town* is a tense and dispiriting story. The story goes of a damaged young lady Rachel who intrudes on the lives of 40 year old Vincent and his teenage daughter Gemma. The story is narrated by Vincent and Gemma, cleverly interpreting their viewpoints. Vincent is a man who is perceived as trying to do the right thing with the intriguing angle as a man who collects broken things.

Gemma on the other hand is a wonderfully realised character who is initially seen as wise beyond her years, but her teenage adolescence soon emerges controlling her thoughts. The real mystery is Rachel who although brittle opens up to Gem and Vincent's mum does not so to Vincent. Cole uses restraint to depict Rachel's

heartbreaking background.

Overall this was a powerful read with its main theme being men's capacity to resort to violence instead of negotiation and self restraint. The highlight is the ending which is startling and surprising. While the book is not without its awkward moments overall this is a great debut from an author worth following.

Brenda says

When thirty nine year old Vincent rounded the corner near his bush home, and came across a car, upside down and steaming, he was stunned. Hitting the brakes, he hurried from his truck, but couldn't see anyone, until he heard moaning coming from the nearby trees. What he saw shocked him to the core! A young woman, not much more than a girl actually, with blood running down the side of her face, and cradling what appeared to him to be a baby. But the baby was too still, too cold...

After the paramedics had taken Rachel (as he later found her name to be) and the baby away to hospital, Vincent and his daughter, sixteen year old Gemma, sat and talked, trying to make sense of the situation. Little did they know their lives were about to change, as with their efforts to help the stranded and unhappy Rachel, they were drawn into her life, and the dangers that came with her past.

A gripping and tension filled debut novel by Australian author Jessie Cole, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is haunting yet tender, filled with emotion, and characters that will eat their way into your heart.

Highly recommended.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

Darkness on the Edge of Town is a haunting tale of loss, tenderness and violence set in an isolated Australian valley. On the road outside the hilltop home Vincent shares with his teenage daughter Gemma, he finds an upturned car and a young woman cradling the lifeless body of her baby son. A collector of broken things and broken people, when the woman reappears just days later, barefoot, bruised and distraught, Vincent takes her into his home, and his heart.

Despite the differences in age and gender, Cole has given both Vincent and Gemma an authentic voice which each resonate with me in a way that is difficult to articulate. Though grounded in simple first person narrative, the prose creates a haunting melody of loneliness, grief and desire.

I developed such genuine compassion for the protagonists of the novel, Vincent's kindness, Gemma's confusion and Rachel's grief are deeply affecting as they vacillate between hope and despair.

Violence, compassion, love, responsibility and abuse entwine to create ambiguous relationships complicated by grief, jealousy and loneliness. *Darkness on the Edge of Town* explores the dynamics of intimacy with a rare sensitivity and truthfulness.

While the ending is perhaps more abrupt than I liked, it also creates a pleasing, if sad, symmetry.

Darkness on the Edge of Town is a compelling novel whose essence is powerful and honest. There are simply some stories that echo somewhere deep within, and for me, this was one of them.

