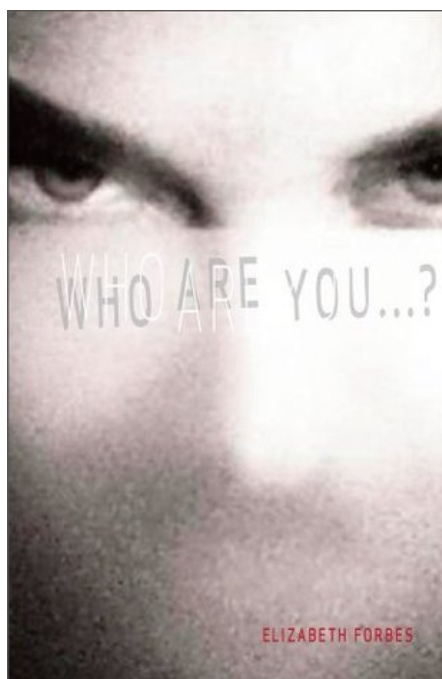




Who Are You?

Elizabeth Forbes

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Alex, a career officer in an elite regiment, returns from Afghanistan a changed man. He has left the Army behind and is attempting to forge a civilian career as a security advisor. His wife, Juliet, is delighted. She, Alex and their son Ben now live in a well-appointed house in a leafy London suburb.

But all is not well. Juliet's research on the internet suggests that Alex is suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) but pride means that he will not seek professional help.

Finding solace in web forums, Juliet is offered the use of a cottage and is urged to remove Ben to a place of safety. After a lot of secretive planning and the financial support of Alex's mother who had suffered at the hands of her husband, Juliet and Ben escape the tyranny of their home with the hope of starting afresh...

Who Are You? Details

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From Reader Review Who Are You? for online ebook

Rathi says

Equal parts horrifying and compelling - this was a very suspenseful thriller. I found it difficult to read the parts on domestic violence, yet I had read them since they were crucial to the central plot. This is a story of 2 broken people trying to make a life together and failing. While PTSD is the reason cited for Alex's violent tendencies, it is obvious that childhood abuse played a bigger role in what he turned out to be.

While necessary to the story, I found the vivid descriptions of the childhood sexual abuse that Alex and Julia went through, off-putting. Innocent children getting raped is bad enough - I really did not want to read the painful details of the acts! I found the end a little abrupt, but after thinking about it, I couldn't think of any other way it could have ended. I have read other stories on domestic violence and spousal abuse - the author seemed to have made an effort to get into the head of the tormentor to give a glimpse of what he goes through, sometimes to the extent of trying to rationalize (a little) his behaviour. The author may not have meant to do that, of course, but I wasn't comfortable with that idea. An abuser is an abuser, no matter what backstory he has. The abused does not feel less pain just because the the abuser had a reason for being abusive.

Janice says

I received a copy of this book through THE Book Club in return for my honest review.

Wow! This is a dense and intense read that is both gripping and uncomfortable. It investigates the unnerving topics of PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and domestic violence.

Alex and Juliet are living a seemingly idyllic life with their adorable son Ben, in an affluent London community. After many years of being posted away from home as part of an elite regiment of the British Army, including a tour in Afghanistan, Alex has agreed to settle down to suburban life. Juliet is thrilled – no more moving every couple of years, no more instability and finally a home of their own.

But the Alex who has returned to her is not the same as the man who left. He is severely damaged, and is battling the constraints of 'normal' life. He's a dangerous man: physically violent, emotionally manipulative and always one step ahead of whoever he considers to be 'the enemy' – unfortunately his biggest perceived threat is Juliet, his wife.

I found Alex as a character is unlikeable. I tried to feel sorry for him, as he seems to be a product of many things over which he has little control, but in the end I just couldn't like him. We learn that Alex's PTSD is not purely from his experiences in battle, but goes much further back to what he endured as a child. Juliet too has a bit of a rocky history but has learned how she has worked hard at leaving it behind her to become the adult she is today.

The story construction is brilliant, giving us the perspective from both Alex's and Juliet's points of view, yet still leaving us wondering where the truth really lies. It's a valuable lesson in caution on the use of online chatrooms (where Juliet finds herself spending more and more time as she finds support and advice there,) and how we represent ourselves to others when we have anonymity to protect what we'd prefer others not to know.

Forbes' highly detailed descriptions of PTSD and its symptoms and reactions are an outstanding testimony to her obviously penetrating research into the topic. What made the book even more compelling for me were her notes at the end, where she talks about her son and how she experiences dealing with him being in the Army, including her pride in him and the work he does.

I highly recommend this book, definitely not as light reading, but as a powerful look into the workings of a disturbed mind (the characters', NOT the writer's) and how external influences may impact a person and all who are close to them.

Liz Barnsley says

Publication Date: Available now from Cutting Edge Press.

Thank you to the author and publisher for the review copy.

I read Elizabeth Forbes debut novel “Nearest Thing to Crazy” and loved it dearly, but with “Who Are You” Ms Forbes has upped the ante and given us an edgy, chilling and absorbing story, much darker in tone but equally addictive, that will leave you reeling.

It is always terribly difficult to review a novel that is as utterly captivating as this one is – especially when the subject matter is one close to the heart of some real life issues – and captures the essence of trauma so perfectly that you just know every single thing here could absolutely be true. The most emotional thing for me was the real authenticity the tale as a whole had – the basis of it being how you can lose someone completely even as they are standing right next to you..

Alex and Juliet found each other, two people who were escaping difficult times, got married and were seemingly set for Happy Ever After. Then Alex returns from war a changed man. Violent and unpredictable, it makes Juliet fear for her life and for her son, yet she cannot quite bring herself to leave. As she seeks solace online, events begin to spiral out of control and she realises that she cannot stay for love alone.

Extremely cleverly constructed – getting the point of view as we do from both Juliet and Alex – the line drawn between what Juliet does and what Alex perceives gives the whole thing an added depth and it is page turning stuff. Brutal in places this is not always easy reading but it is ever compelling and absolutely captures the realities behind PTSD and all its consequences. The characters live and breathe inside your head, and the moral compass is blurred. I often felt sorry for Alex despite his actions and also quite often disliked Juliet intensely despite what she is going through. As in real life, right and wrong are not always clear cut. Completely fascinated, even during the heart stopping moments, I could barely look away.

Overall this is superb. Yes its a psychological thriller in many ways – it twists away and turns things around on you – but the soul of it is something very different. A tale of the human spirit this one will stay with you long after finishing it.

Not to be missed.

Happy Reading Folks!

Beadyjan says

Finished this serious head-fuck of a thriller late last night - blew me away!

Juliet and Alex are a young married couple with a little boy Ben. Juliet is hell bent on creating the perfect home, she has a mental image of being part of the ideal family in a glossy magazine home, surrounded by impeccable neighbours. But this utopian dream eludes her. Alex has been away fighting in Afghanistan and despite longing for his return, he has come back to her a shadow of his former self. Gone is the strong, supportive, caring rock she has built her dreams on and in his place the Alex with whom she is now living is

cruel, cold and dangerous to get on the wrong side of.

Getting on the wrong side of him is easy for Juliet, the only way she feels she has any control in their marriage is the small ways she can wind him up and goad him into a reaction, even if that reaction is far from the response she desires.

Both had a fractured upbringing and both of them are flawed, their backgrounds something each partner originally sought to protect the other from, but quite how flawed both are, creeps up on you insidiously and terrifyingly. The author does a sensational job of not allowing you to really make up your mind which, if either party is the least or most reliable narrator and I wavered from being on one side to being on the others side whilst heartily disliking and despising both of them yet I wasn't without sympathy either - brilliantly done!

Juliet becomes so unable to cope with her husband who is so removed from the man she fell deeply in love with and whom she is certain is suffering from Post traumatic stress disorder, but is unable and unwilling to admit it, that she seeks support from an on-line forum; something I think most of us can relate to, and she finds help and advice from another woman who has been in a similar situation. Soon her own situation takes darker and more dreadful turns (be warned ... this book is VERY graphic and I found some scenes harrowing and stomach turning yet vital to paint the bleak picture of the situation this couple are in) She knows she must take action to save herself and 5 year old Ben from the desolate sham her marriage has turned into.

This book shows how circumstances shape lives, and victim can turn to culprit and once you're on that downward spiral nobody is going to show up and rescue you unless you take matters in your own hands, and even then, how can you be sure you're doing the right thing?

It is merciless and barbaric and yet heart wrenching too, it plays with your mind and gets in your head and is as twisted as anything I've ever read. It seems almost depraved to admit how much I enjoyed reading it, but if you like your mind to be tweaked and enjoy your psychological thrillers to be raw and abrasive you'll love this.

My thanks to Netgalley and Cutting Edge Press for providing me with a copy to review and to Elizabeth Forbes for making sure I had a sleepless night or two!!

Paul says

Who are you? Interesting & Challenging

Elizabeth Forbes' second novel *Who Are You?* is an interesting and challenging look at how we in the UK deal with PTSD in our young men that we send to war. It raises some interesting questions as to whether we do enough not only to support the ex soldier but do we support the ever hidden victims of PTSD the families who are left to deal with it. Mental health issues such as PTSD is not a sexy subject nor is the returning soldier who has PTSD we normally paint them as returning heroes not damaged vessels.

Who Are You? is quite a dark and twisted read dealing with an issue others would rather avoid, in an interesting read with two narratives, that of Alex the returning soldier and Juliet his wife and mother to their child Ben. We are able to feel and see what Alex feels especially as he is working in the City in a job he does not enjoy living in the suburbs he does not like. Juliet is a stay at home maker who is building a beautiful home in the London suburb of Richmond.

Alex now that he has left the army and attempting to live a 'normal' life but he is not the same Alex that went to war he is totally different. He was once a loving person but now is abusive and cruel and even a danger to his wife and young son. It is through the use of internet forums she believes that Alex is suffering from PTSD but she realises that things can only get worse for them.

Forbes develops throughout the book the scary details of a broken man with PTSD who cannot recognise what is really happening around him. We get inside both Alex's and Juliet's mind and see how their thinking is developing even though both are damaged in their own way. It really does illicit a lot of sympathy for Ben their child who is the innocent observer and participant in this story. Juliet knows she has to get Ben away from Alex for his own safety and hope to start afresh with a new life.

This is an excellently well written and researched book on a taboo subject many would like to avoid. In that this book could be just applicable to any soldier coming home from any war in our history as one can mend the body but the mind is totally different. Without recognising that PTSD is a mental health issue and we need to recognise that this does change people and their memories we are only going to repeat what is happening to survivors and their families as they suffer together – the unwitting victims of war.

Who Are You? is not an easy read and it is not really designed to be but it is a compelling read especially with the character development as we see how the PTSD affects Alex and his family. The way Forbes has written the story using a double narrative is challenging but well worth it as it helps you to stop and think about mental health issues and how poorly they are dealt with in and outside of the army. I would advise be prepared to be horrified at times but feel complete sympathy for all their battles with PTSD.

Bookread2day says

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU ALEX?

Juliet and Alex are a happy married couple live in a well-appointed house in a leafy London suburb with their son, Ben. Juliet is delighted that Alex is a career officer in an elite regiment, but all is not well when Alex returns home from Afghanistan a completely change man.

Juliet researches on the internet with a support group that inform her that Alex is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder known as PTSD and he needs help.

Juliet knows that Alex had suffered physical abuse at school and inflicting harm in Afghanistan which has led him to developing PTSD.

Juliet begins to fear for her life as Alex has tried to strangle her in their bed during the night. Alex becomes increasingly unsettled putting Juliet through the most horrifying ordeal, one that makes Juliet determined to leave Alex. Twisted Alex does not see that he has done anything wrong all he sees is that Juliet is a useless woman and infuriating.

Elizabeth Forbes knows how to write novels after novels that make your stomach jump. I have read and reviewed Nearest Thing To crazy wrote by Elizabeth Forbes, which was absolutely spectacular frightening and that book led me to wanting to read more by Elizabeth Forbes, so I decided to read Who Are You. I just can not wait for Elizabeth Forbes to publish her next novel.

If you want an crime author to follow then Elizabeth Forbes is the perfect number one choice. I hope many

readers enjoy reading all of Elizabeth Forbes books as much as I have.

Anne says

Who Are You? by Elizabeth Forbes is published in June by Cutting Edge Press, and is her second novel. I reviewed her first; Nearest Thing to Crazy on Random Things in June 2013.

Who are you? That is the ultimate question. Who are you and what did you do with my husband? For Juliet, that is the question that keeps repeating itself, over and over in her head.

Juliet and Alex are two people who really should never have met and married. Troubled, scarred by life, and broken inside, theirs is a match that can range from the delights of heaven to the absolute terror that is hell on earth.

Alex was a serving soldier, Juliet is his wife; a stay-at-home Mum, a creator of a beautiful home, the mother of his son Ben.

Alex is cruel to Juliet. He is a sadistic bastard who appears to take pleasure in inflicting as much pain as he can, both physically and emotionally. Alex is a gentleman, a great host, a good neighbour. Alex is two men and Juliet is never quite sure which Alex she will wake up beside.

Juliet herself is damaged, broken, a little bit twisted. Juliet knows just how to make Alex suffer too. A toy gun for their son, a war film on DVD, these are triggers that will reduce Alex to a vulnerable, shaking wreck and Juliet has been hurt enough by Alex to get pleasure from his pain.

Readers of Elizabeth Forbes' previous novel; the incredible Nearest Thing to Crazy, may be expecting another psychological thriller. Who Are You is very different, it's in a league of its own and yet again Elizabeth Forbes has created a cleverly woven story that grips the reader right by the throat.

Who Are You is dark, incredibly dark. It is uncomfortable, it made my heart race so much that I broke out into a sweat. It is a study of the human brain and of how the horrors of past experiences can burn themselves into the back of the eyeballs, and onto the brain and never, ever go away.

I am in awe of Elizabeth Forbes. Her writing is chillingly unsettling; tense and so cleverly paced. Prepare yourself to be consumed by this story, to be terrified and at the same time to empathise with the hidden victims of other people's actions.

A triumph!

Hilary Weinstein says

This was a clever and well written book. It is insightful into what can happen when a person returns from war and is suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It really is an eye opener. However, having read the other book by Lizzie Forbes, The Nearest Thing to Crazy, I was spoilt. I felt it was just not in the same

league. It took a while to get into the plot and when it did, I felt I knew what was going to happen. A little twist at the end which I didn't expect though. Was still a great book to read and would recommend it.

Stargazer says

although it kept me engaged i didn't like any characters so am ambivalent about it.

Claire says

It's an uncomfortable read. Don't get me wrong, I enjoyed it and I wanted to keep reading but the story was shocking.

What happens to Alex and Juliet could happen to any forces family which is why it's so uncomfortable.

It's my first Elizabeth Forbes read and it won't be my last. It's well written; from the outset Alex was unlikeable and I felt for Juliet but as the story develops, I wanted her to get out.

Helen (TBC) says

A dark and compelling read about a couple, who outwardly look like they have the perfect family - but who knows what goes on behind closed doors.

Both of them badly damaged by traumatic childhood incidents, She has finally got her heart's desire ... her husband out of the army into a safe job in the city, a permanent base that they can call their own in a nice house in a good neighbourhood where they can raise their darling son. But Alex has more than his traumatic childhood to deal with - he is suffering badly from PTSD and can't or won't admit to any weakness or that he's in need of help.

In this dark, fast paced and (at times) downright uncomfortable novel Elizabeth Forbes gives us a well crafted account exposing horrific aspects of domestic violence, and how the victim will repeatedly forgive and protect the abuser. She introduces us the terror of having PTSD and the terror of living with a person who has PTSD which in this case has manifested into exaggerating his already controlling behaviour. The story line is cleverly constructed and we are drip fed events from the past, learn how supportive internet groups can be when you can't or dare not tell anyone what you are going through, but also how dangerous it can be to trust some people in those groups. I actually didn't particularly like either of the main characters but, as in her earlier book, Nearest Thing To Crazy, Elizabeth Forbes knows just how to mess with your head and throughout the book as we learn more of the past, we are led to sympathise with one and then the other.

On a practical note this well researched story helps to highlight the problem of PTSD and domestic violence, which can only be a good thing. The notes at the end of the novel make for interesting reading. Highly recommended 4.5 stars!

Sarah says

4.5 stars. Due to the nature of the story parts of this book were hard to read but I've got to applaud the author

for tackling such a sensitive subject. Great book with strong characters.

Karen says

I haven't yet read Elizabeth's first novel, *The Nearest Thing to Crazy* (although Cutting Edge Press have now very kindly sent me a copy) so I didn't know what to expect from Elizabeth's writing. *Who Are You?* is an absolute stunner of a book and its twisty storyline will completely throw your mind and leave you wondering who you can believe.

Juliet is married to two people – Alex, who has always been a bit controlling but who was also caring and loving – however that was before he returned from Afghanistan. The Alex that Juliet is now married to is broken and haunted by his experiences; he has changed into a cruel, sadistic and unpredictable bully. There are times when he can be a loving husband but these are becoming few and far between and Juliet is becoming very afraid of him – in fact she is beginning to hate him.

Juliet and Alex are both damaged people and probably should never have married. Both had traumatic childhoods resulting in them being scarred in their different ways. I started off disliking both characters, then my allegiance changed to Juliet, then to Alex however ultimately I felt sympathy for both of them. It was clear that Alex was suffering severe psychological problems however being the 'strong' man, he would not seek help. Juliet is not without her faults – she knows Alex's weaknesses and to how to exploit them – whether it's encouraging their young son Ben to play at soldiers and pretend to shoot daddy with a toy gun or playing a war DVD when she knows the loud bangs will affect Alex – in their own way they seem to be hell bent on destroying each other.

The writing is edgy; there is a rawness to the text and no punches are pulled in the telling, indeed some scenes are quite shocking in their cruelty and will leave you gasping. I'm not going into detail about the plot but the dual narration of Alex and Juliet work perfectly together and ensure the story flows seamlessly. There are no superfluous characters – even the supporting ones are just as relevant to the story. We're pulled into the heads of both main characters and through the ensuing powerful and sometimes, frightening, storyline we watch them fighting their own private war with each other. Who will win – I'm not going to tell you – you will have to read this fabulous book for yourself.

My thanks to Cutting Edge Press for the advance reading copy.

Dawn says

Firstly a huge thanks to Hattie and all at Cutting Edge Press for the ARC of *Who Are You?* I was given a copy in exchange for an honest review.

Wow, what a book! Where do I start? Alex and Juliet are living, what on the surface is a reasonably 'normal' life for a couple embarking on life together after Alex left the forces. I think most of us, news reading people wouldn't expect this to be plain sailing given the reality of the conflicts in Afghanistan. Anybody who has served there is bound to be affected no matter how rounded a person they were beforehand.

This book spares no punches, it was all consuming the characters and the scenario's so life like and real I felt genuine pain, hurt and distress at times. At times I thought I couldn't read anymore and kept closing the book, then opening it and reading a bit more. It was harrowing, yet compulsive. I didn't want to read it yet I

had to know what happened next.

As you would expect it's not just a simple story about someone suffering with PTSD and how this impacts on their family. Lizzie gave us two, deep, highly intelligent, lead characters who each had a story. As ever events in childhood rear their head in adulthood. The children we were definitely shape the adults we become.

This book is a like a game of cat and mouse, with the protagonist changing with each chapter. My thoughts and feelings towards both Juliet and Alex changed more times than in any other book I've read. I genuinely despised them both at times and at others felt such deep pain and concern it was weird. When you live with someone for a long time you know what buttons to press to evoke a reaction, be that good or bad and both Alex and Juliet were experts - each knowing the others weak spot.

Life should be about discovering new things, pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone and trying different things. I liked the synopsis for this book and really wanted to read it yet I sit here now a couple of weeks after finishing it and I'm still trying to process my thoughts.

Would I recommend it? - absolutely. It has to be one of the best written books I've read in a long time. It's darker than most of my friends would read, and when asked if I enjoyed it I'm almost hesitant to say yes, it feels wrong for so many reasons - anyone who has read it will know what I'm talking about.

I'd urge anyone who enjoys a really good book, that'll make you think, is happy to be shifted outside of their comfort zone to give it a go. It'll stay with you long after the final page but that's a good thing. The best kind of book in my opinion is a book that makes you think, that keeps you guessing and Lizzie did this with panache. There are several twists that had me virtually talking to myself, silently praying and almost too scared to read on in case I didn't like the outcome, I'm so glad I did.

Thank you Lizzie - I've found another new author :) Cutting Edge Press - the name says it all - I'm so glad I stumbled across you via Amanda Jennings. Two powerful ladies that pack a punch.

Joan says

After reading and reviewing the highly acclaimed debut novel written by Elizabeth Forbes, 'Nearest Thing to Crazy', I was so excited to be offered a review copy of 'Who Are You?' in return for an honest review. I could hardly wait to start the first of the two parts the book is divided into, 'Homecoming'. But I was not disappointed at all, in fact from the first page I was so engrossed that I was kept reading late into the night, unable to tear myself away from this electrifying psychological thriller.

'Homecoming' referred to the return to civilian life of Alex, a dashing and well-respected Army Officer, returned safely from his tour in Afghanistan to his wife Juliet and their young son Ben. They have bought the house of Juliet's dreams in a dappled suburban road, where they are integrating into the affluent neighbourhood with ease. All should be rosy, but it isn't. The Alex who went away to war a tender and romantic husband has changed beyond all recognition. He is angry at everything, controlling, bullish and in denial, refusing to accept that he is suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Juliet is sympathetic but determined to manage the situation and help her husband adapt the life in Civvy Street, until events take a dramatic turn and Alex turns on her, imprisoning her so that there are no witnesses to her injuries. When Ben takes ill he refuses to let her go to hospital with him, an act of extreme cruelty for a worried mother. At this point Juliet realises that if she stays with Alex she and Ben will never be safe.

The second part of the book, entitled 'Retreat', sees Juliet stealthily making plans to escape from Alex, accepting advice and ultimately help from an online forum supporting the victims of abuse. She flees with Ben to a remote cottage, their place of safety, hiding her tracks, deleting her online history and breathing a sigh of relief. Surely she and Ben will be safe from Alex?

What happens next is truly horrific, terrifying, and ugly. Alex vows not to let her escape and he deploys plans of his own, using his specialist Army skills in tracking to ensure that he will get Ben back home. I'm not going to tell any more of the story, but secrets are revealed and this sets up an explosive climax to this harrowing story of betrayal, abuse, disloyalty and evilness.

The characterisation is excellent. I felt sorry for Alex, who was haunted by the horrors of the war crimes against humanity he had witnessed on the battlefield, he was plagued by memories of abuse and paternal bullying in his childhood and, even though he clearly adored his mother, he had the feeling that she should have stepped in to protect him. He was confused and could not think rationally. All the same, he was totally psychotic, out of control and relentless in achieving what he wanted. Juliet, to some extent did not realise the pressure Alex felt to provide for the life she yearned for. She was damaged and had been out of control as well. She was feisty and determined. She had her own agenda, but certainly did not deserve to be treated so brutally and totally without empathy. I cared about these characters, especially Ben, only five years old and unable to verbalise his fears, but show his deep distress and unhappiness by being mean at school, lying and bedwetting. He too was confused, he couldn't work out who was the bad guy in what was happening, but he certainly didn't like it at all. I feared for one and all, worried about what would happen next.

I loved this novel and know this will feature in my top picks for 2014. Well-done Elizabeth. I can't wait until your next novel is in my hands!

Thanks to Hatty and Cutting Edge Press for sending this wonderful novel for me to review and to Elizabeth Forbes for inviting me to be one of her first readers.
