

THE GIRLS WHO DISAPPEARED

By Claire Douglas

Anna S:

I have read "The Girls that Disappeared" (at high speed, I regret to say - reading, not disappearance!) so I have a few things to say. If I just regarded it as a puzzle to work out, I found it gripping, and I enjoyed following the twists and turns (neat surprise at the end - spoiler alert!). However, as a work of fiction I could not find a single character I could believe in or care about. There seemed to be a vast crowd of them, all with their forgettable names - actually I found it difficult to remember who was who, especially when several of them turned out to be someone else after all. I had thought before I read the book, that the practicalities of dealing with three bodies were going to be difficult, and so it proved - to be honest, I thought it unbelievable. So I'm afraid this book does not go on my bookshelves to keep - out to the charity pile with it!

Jen L

Claire Douglas is one of my favourite authors, I enjoyed the book very much, there is always a twist at the end of her books and usually the person you least expect to commit a murder and even knowing that I didn't expect it.

Lots of twists throughout the book

Well written

A good read

Margaret J

The story is set in a rural Wiltshire town. The place is eerie and mysterious, with its standing stones, and possible supernatural happenings. Twenty years ago, three teenage girls had mysteriously disappeared and in the present-day Jenna, a BBC podcaster, travels to the area to investigate. She stays in an isolated chalet, a risky thing to do bearing in mind the story she is covering. She is not made welcome and starts receiving threatening notes and it is clear that someone wants her out of the way.

In 1998 Olivia Rutherford was driving some friends home from a night out and as the weather turns bad a man suddenly appears on the road and she swerves but crashes and is knocked out. When she comes round, she finds her friends have disappeared.

Olivia is the only survivor of the car crash but the reader is almost expecting the others to turn up. Olivia's mother (Anastacia, known as Stace) seems to be hiding something regarding the crash. Wesley, Olivia's boyfriend, stands by her after the accident, but he is also hiding his involvement in the deceit. Madame Tovey's part is only relevant in that it looks as if one of her predictions is true. Dale, the policeman is helpful and the only likeable character. John Paul, Olivia's dad, had been in prison for drug dealing even though he had been innocent as it had been Stace who had put the drugs in his bag. There are many underlying things going on in the story such as the drug smuggling. I found it all rather confusing

The revelation at the end was a letdown, although at least Stace and Westley were arrested for drug trafficking and Olivia found someone to help her with the horses and riding lessons. It looked as if Jenna and Dale could get together in the end. Despite everything it was an enjoyable read.

Chris T

A dual storyline, told from POV of Olivia, the one girl still alive of the four who met with a car accident on a dark forest road 20 years ago, and then Jenna, the modern-day podcaster, out to investigate and solve the mystery of the disappearance of the other three girls on that night. There is also at the same time a mysterious backstory being told to us by an unknown person called Staci.

And there's the rub for me, I enjoyed the story as a mystery, but I didn't find it a horror story/thriller at all. In fact, I thought that angle was cliché-ridden and laughable. For example:

Jenna reports meeting Madame Tovey and her crystal ball: "I knew you were coming". I resist rolling my eyes. (But I didn't!)

Jenna sees what she says is an ominous sounding pub, The Raven, on the corner. Its sign - a big black bird with sinister beady eyes set against a grey sky - gives me the creeps. (The word "sinister" is applied liberally throughout the book.)

The sinister sounding Devils Corridor is mentioned many times. Eg It really is a sinister lonely road. The type of road you get in tv dramas where people pull over and bury a body. And ..

A man appears out of nowhere and says: "It ain't safe to be on this road all alone like".

More eyerolling.

Some of the themes were interesting, smuggling, county lines drugs distribution, gaslighting, broken relationships.

Some of the writing I thought was rather juvenile, eg "Her heart fluttered when she remembered Derreck in the pool last night, the water rippling over his toned chest and the moonlight catching his gleaming strong shoulders." OMG, Darcy lives again!

The storyline left a few questions hanging: why on earth go as a lone woman to a deep dark forest lodge to stay to investigate a mysterious murder? Why on earth weren't the bodies found? Surely hiding three girls bodies, and then a man's body, is not an easy thing to achieve? Why was the investigation being reopened after 20 years?

Well anyway the story dragged on a bit but played out rather fast towards the end, with a sort of Poirot type reveal. It wasn't at all surprising but I did enjoy it.

William H

Outside our selection I don't read much fiction. But I have not read a more stimulating first four pages of a book.

Usually, such books spend the first chapters with descriptive prose of characters or locations. Here the storyline continued to be fascinating. The text at the end of each chapter made me want to read on.

For a mystery novel it was a page turner and the vehicle of the young journalist's inquiries was an excellent platform. It was a must to know what happened to the missing girls. It was exciting to speculate – but where were they? Had they been spirited away somewhere? Had they been kidnapped? I wanted them to be found alive. I like happy endings.

After such compelling reading and potential, I found the denouement rather disappointing.

Sabine D

An easy and enjoyable read.

I enjoy a good thriller. I usually enjoy the intrigue and the who done it. Although *The Girls who Disappeared* is by no means a masterpiece, but it is pleasantly written, gripping and also clever in many respects. The narrative kept me interested, at times keeping me off balance. There were so many turns and twists in the story. I certainly want to read on and know more. In other words, a page turner. I also enjoy the psychological study of the characters involved as well as their history.

The forest setting and the incessant rain added to the atmosphere of dread and suspicion which a good thriller needs. The sense of paranormal was an add-on that was overall cleverly dealt with. It would appeal to readers who are drawn to that kind of experience as much as to people like me who have no such interest. I enjoyed the portrayal of Jenna the journalist. She is ambitious, determined, almost ridiculously fearless to get her podcast. While at the same time fighting her own battles as a mother whose marriage is about to fall apart.

I found the section in Thailand at odds with the rest of the book. Not because of the way it fitted with the plot but because it almost felt as if it was written by someone else.

The ending was disappointing and unconvincing as you don't understand why the 3 girls would have been left to die and Olivia saved by circumstances.

Finally, I thought the use of italics for the section in Thailand very clever: there were no dates, the characters are at first apparently unknown. It's only as the plot unfurls that we can make sense of those chapters.

At the meeting we had a lot of fun dissecting the believable or unbelievable aspects of the thriller, expressing the confusion over the characters due to their different names, enjoying the thrill of the scary passages, discussing how gripping the story was... despite the cliché, at times laughable aspects of the thriller. We all agreed that 'The Girls who Disappeared' made an enjoyable read.

It was interesting to hear from Jean about Wiltshire where the book is set. A county still imbued by its legends and myths - the Standing stones of Avebury play an integral part of the suspense as well as the dark forest of Savernake. It was also remarked upon that Richard Osmond enjoyed the book too!