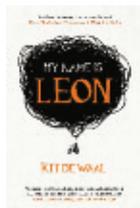


## My Name is Leon

Written by Kit de Waal  
Viking £12.99 ISBN: 978-0241207086

This poignant, thought-provoking first novel is a very approachable book for teenage readers looking to move into adult literature. The heart-breaking story is set in the 1980s when Leon and his baby brother, Jake, are taken into care after their mother's mental health deteriorates and she is unable to look after them. To Leon's dismay the boys are soon separated. Jake, who is still a cute baby and is white, is soon adopted. Leon, who is loving and helpful, but is also much older, mixed race and vulnerable, remains in foster care. Over the next few months Leon carefully makes plans to be reunited with Jake and their mother. Meanwhile he strikes up a friendship with a group of gardeners who meet and work their plots at the allotments near his foster home and from them he learns about prejudice and racial tension as well as how to grow plants. This is a powerful, deeply-moving story that looks at many important issues, but is primarily about a boy's enduring love for his fractured family.

*Jan Lennon*



## Why I went back

Written by James Clammer  
Andersen £7.99 ISBN: 978-1783443772

A sinister story, full of magic and suspense, is set in the first person. Aidan promises to explain about magic – not the conjuring, card trick kind, but “crazy, scary, ancient magic”. His bike is stolen by lads whom he chases to an abandoned factory. He needs his bike to deliver the post his Dad has been hoarding since his Mum was sectioned, but when he finds it, that is not all he finds. There is an old man, dressed in rags and chained by his ankles to the floor. Aidan has a choice – take his bike and risk the consequences to himself and the man, or come back to find out exactly what is really happening. Why is the old man shackled to the floor and what secret is he keeping that his captors desperately want? This is a dark story of magic, myth, relationships and strong characters.

*Ingrid Fox*

## The Hired Girl

Written by Laura Amy Schlitz  
Walker £12.99 ISBN: 978-1406361407

Joan Skraggs loves to read, yearning for a world of excitement and true love. However, since her mother died, her life revolves around the drudgery of cooking and cleaning. Her brothers and father seem to suppress her desire for learning and education, which she gets a taste of whilst at school. Eventually, Joan rebels, and runs away to the big city. There she becomes a hired girl, working for a Jewish family. The story is told through the medium of a diary, written by our protagonist Joan. We witness her feelings and emotions as she reaches out into the world to take her place – questioning her faith and her dreams. She begins to cause problems in the household, as her own self-questioning and desire for learning brings her into contact with people considered ‘above her station’. Joan's intelligence and innocence widen the existent cracks amongst the family, and things will never be the same again. This novel is truly a masterpiece, movingly and believably portrayed through the eyes of Joan. We feel her pain, witness her joy, and hurt as her dreams crumble.

*Allister Jordan*



## Follow Me Back

Written by Nicci Cloke  
Hot Key £7.99 ISBN: 978-1471405082

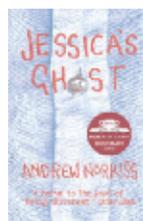
Lizzie has gone missing and the police investigation uncovers an unsavoury pattern of online relationships with strangers. Her friends are interviewed by the police, including Aidan, who knows more than he is prepared to reveal. The scene is set for a gripping YA novel that has more twists and turns than a plate of spaghetti. The masterful layers of suspense and red herrings veil an ending that you will not see coming. In addition to being an exceptionally good story, this novel provides the most convincing argument yet for never trusting, or believing, what you are told online by so-called friends, whose stories you are unable to collaborate.



*Yvonne Coppard*

## Jessica's Ghost

Written by Andrew Norriss  
David Fickling £7.99 ISBN: 978-1910200568



*Jessica's Ghost* employs a light, yet insightful, touch as it tells the story of a group of friends who each feel so socially ostracised that they have all seriously considered suicide. Francis gets a hard time because he is passionate about fashion, Andi has developed an aggressive, tough exterior to fend off criticism that she is unfeminine and Roland has become reclusive because he has been relentlessly teased about his weight. However, being outsiders is not all that these young people have in common. Unlike everyone else around them, they can all see Jessica, a girl who happens to be dead, and, eventually, they discover that Jessica killed herself. It would seem that Jessica remains here, as a ghost, in order to save someone from suicide - but who? Could it be one of the three friends? Will Francis, Andi and Roland succumb to the despair of suicide or, helped by Jessica, will they be able to support each other in regaining inner-strength and self-belief? Whilst dealing with such serious, and potentially distressing, matters *Jessica's Ghost* offers young readers hope and optimism for the future.

*Annalise Taylor*

## All of the Above

Written by Juno Dawson  
Hot Key £6.99 ISBN: 978-1471404672

This is a very well-crafted and well-written book for older teenagers. Victoria Grande moves to a new house on the south coast and has to brave the terrors of starting a new school for her sixth form career. She is accepted into a friendship group and over the course of Year 12 manages to establish relationships and learn some important lessons. The plot is a balanced mixture of teenage concerns, mainly about sex but also social protest and personal tragedy. By the end of the year, Victoria has learned to trust her own judgement and go with her instincts, even when this takes her in unexpected directions. Brilliantly capturing the thoughts and dialogue of teenagers, the writing is purposeful and well-paced, and deals honestly and openly with a whole range of teenage issues. Dealing frankly with the sexual act, the text reduces copious swear words to asterisks, which has the unexpected effect of making them seem more, rather than less, powerful. Overall this is an excellent read which deals well with teenage sexuality, the search for personal identity, and the dangers of making assumptions and thereby labelling people.



*Liz Dubber*

Apologies to Rosemary Hayes whose novel, *The Mark*, was wrongly attributed in Issue 61.