



# The Last Boat Home

*Dea Brovig*

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## **The Last Boat Home** Dea Brovig

Explosive, dark and tender, *The Last Boat Home* is a devastating novel about sacrifice, survival and a mother's love. If you loved *The Light Between Oceans* or *The Snow Child*, this is for you.

On the wind-swept southern coast of Norway, sixteen-year-old Else is out on the icy sea, dragging her oars through the waves while, above her, storm clouds are gathering. Surrounded by mountains, snow and white-capped water, she looks across the fjord and dreams of another life, of escape and faraway lands.

Back on shore, her father sits alone in his boathouse with a jar of homebrew. In the Best Room, her mother covers her bruises and seeks solace in prayer. Each tries to hide the truth from this isolated, God-fearing community they call home.

Until one night changes everything.

More than thirty years later, the return of an old friend forces Else to relive the events that marked the end of her childhood.

## **The Last Boat Home Details**

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Author : Dea Brovig

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## From Reader Review The Last Boat Home for online ebook

### Charlotte (Escapades of a Bookworm) says

Review also appears on my blog Escapades of a Bookworm

The pace of *The Last Boat Home* is slow, matching the sluggishness of life on the coast of snowy Norway and the harsh reality that occurs due to the mood swings of an alcoholic father. This slow pace means that the ending quietly builds up unexpectedly. And allows the reader to will feel the same emotions as Else - shock and outrage over what occurs.

The reader's interest is kept throughout the book, by the puzzlement of who is Marianne's father. Is it Lars? Her boyfriend in the 70's. Or a member of the travelling circus who comes to town? Perhaps the strongman? Or an unknown?

While the abuse and harshness of Else's life are the main themes of the book, the other key theme is secrets - Else and her mother keep secret the abuse they suffer from Else's alcoholic father, Else keeps secret her relationship with Lars, and there is the huge secret of who Marianne's father is.

This is an interesting and thought-provoking book. And is not something that a reader should pick up expecting escapism or the thrill of young love. Yet despite this, *The Last Boat Home* will absorb your interest and keep you guessing to the end.

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### Cleo Bannister says

Dea Brøvig conjures up a desolate and harsh debut novel which is mirrored by the unforgiving Norwegian winters which is described so vividly that I longed to pass the young Else Dybdahl yet another jumper to keep her warm on her ferry home from the town at the end of each school day.

The story is split a past that covers the time from 1974-1976 and the present day, 2009, where Else is forced to confront those memories she had hoped were safely buried when her boyfriend returns to the island to live in his family home with his young wife and children.

We know that Else is the mother to Marianne, and Grandmother to eleven year old Liv who she lives with in the same town that she grew up in but what we don't know is how Else came to have a baby which is where the narration begins, at an early age. A shocking event especially considering how important the church is to the inhabitants.

This is a bleak story as we peek behind the door to the realities of the Dybdahl household, one where the family turn up to church no matter how many bruises Else's mother Dagny has to cover with powder, a household ruled by the ups and downs of an alcoholic father and husband. The descriptions of the hardships that feature in the daily life of the Dybdahl's along with the cold and wet feet from snow and ice only serve to make this an almost unbearably claustrophobic read.

Brøvig cleverly keeps the pace slow reflecting the long and cold days as Else and Dybdahl struggle to keep life moving forwards with the small relief of a visit from a travelling circus, so that the reveal happens when the tension has been ramped up to the maximum. Else has school to distract her but she is ever mindful of the cow that needs milking as well as the pressures her boyfriend, Lars, heaps on her to sneak out join him. With

the fire and brimstone sermons seemingly aimed at the inhabitants by the fearsome Pastor, Brøvig accurately captures the desires and fears that rule Else's days not least the shame she would heap on her family if caught.

A book which is thought-provoking, rather than enjoyable, this would work well as an interesting, if somewhat harrowing, book club read.

I received a copy of this book from the publishers Random House UK in return for this unbiased review.

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## **Karen M says**

This debut novel is a bit of a mixed bag. I actually thought it had been translated from Norwegian, but a little basic research revealed that it had not; Ms Brovig however, grew up in Norway before moving to England at age seventeen. It shows here and there in her English. I decided not to mind when I noticed the writing because the English was slightly off in tiny ways like saying Else walked to the car 'together with' someone rather than just 'with' them.

The second criticism is the pacing of the novel; the story cuts back and forth between Else-then in 1974, 1975, and Else-now in 2009. There is a lot of setting up that takes quite a long time, and it was difficult to see where the story was going for about the first third of the book - that's quite long to stay with it, and I expect some people gave up. Which is a shame, because once it got going, it was pretty good.

Dea Brovig has captured the hard, harsh environment of wintertime Norway exceptionally well; she makes us feel the cold, the privations of a poor family, the deep unrelenting coldness of life in this place. She has mirrored it in the hard, harsh lives of Else and her parents. This is Norway before the oil industry, before it became a rich country. The people of the town and this particular family, are poor. They don't have quite enough of what they need.

And so it is for Else too; her family isn't quite ok. Her father is a shrimp fisherman, and a drunk. Her mother is a loving enough mother, but copes by trying to pacify and not rock the boat. She is steeped in the Lutheran religion, as is the rest of the town. Pastor Seip, a gimlet-eyed man of very little compassion or Christian charity, is a powerful figure in town. I hoped he might fall into a freezing lake but he got off lightly. Of course young Else, full of life and hope, wants a bigger world. She finds a degree of it with Lars, son of the richest man in town and possessed of degrees of freedom barely imaginable to the repressed Else. She finds another thread of it in the Circus that comes to town, and is fascinated by the exotic strong man.

And then, her world comes crashing down via a stunning act of betrayal - and all that long set up makes sense. Else's mother, who, in her rigid adhering to social mores, has failed Else over and over, comes through (thank god!), binding them firmly together forever. This is the other important dimension of this book - the bond between women, and between mothers and daughters in particular. Else's relationship with her own daughter feels difficult and real and modern.

The slow pace of the set up means that when the truth is finally revealed to us, it has quite a punch. The novel ends on a note of new hope, and it's good place to leave it.

I'm glad I stuck through the initial slowness; it's a powerful story by the end of it.

## RitaSkeeter says

Else lives with her daughter Marianne and grand-daughter Liv, when seeing a familiar person from her past causes her to remember events from 1975/6 that led to her pregnancy and the subsequent birth of Marianne. The story is told in two different time frames, the present (being 2009) and 1975/6.

Beautifully written, the book evokes a sense of time and place better than anything I've read since Burial Rites. There were passages in the book that were very powerful.

However, for such a very slim book, it took me a long time to get through. Primarily because once I had set the book down I had no real desire to pick it up again. The story is very slow and ponderous, and the 'mystery' of who Marianne's father is is quite apparent from the early stages of the novel. I've complained bitterly in the past about books that, although are written skillfully, lack interest due to the slowness of the plot. I have the same criticism of this book. In this case, it is a shame because it is clear this is an accomplished writer and there was potential for this book to be so much more.

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## Hazel says

*I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.*

*The Last Boat Home* is the debut novel of Norwegian author Dea Brøvig. Set in a small village on the south coast of Norway, the story follows Else Dybdahl through two different time periods: then (1974-1976) and now (2009). The narrative begins in 1976 where Else, who we currently know nothing about, is in labour. After this the tale switches between then and now (then becoming 1974 and continuing up until the birth of Else's daughter Marianne).

Else is living in the same area that she grew up in with her daughter and granddaughter, Liv. An ex-boyfriend from her childhood, Lars, has just moved back to the area with his wife and children. In the past Else and Lars snuck around keeping their relationship secret from the God-fearing community, in particular from the rather strict pastor.

Brøvig keeps the reader engaged by leaving us wanting to know, and trying to work out who Marianne's father is. We learn that Else was only in her teens at the time of her birth. Is Lars the father? Or was a member of the travelling circus that comes to one of the local farms responsible? In which case was it the strong man, or one of the other acts? Or was there someone else?

As well as the religious aspects this book also contains the topic of abuse, which Else and her mother, Dagny, are exposed to by their alcoholic father and husband. However, in my opinion, the strongest theme is secrets. Not only are there secret relationships, the Dybdahls keep themselves isolated to prevent their friends and church society from discovering their true home circumstances. And once Else becomes pregnant? Well that is yet another reason to isolate themselves. In the present day there are still secrets. Else does not want Marianne to know who her real father is and so has lied about the truth not only to her daughter and granddaughter, but also to Lars and everyone else she knows.

Personally I think the story line could have been stronger and possibly more drawn out to create a greater sense of suspense, however Brøvig successfully conjures up images of mountains, fjords and farmlands of a

Norwegian community. Overall it was a good book and a fairly quick read too.

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### **Jennimen says**

This book came to me by way of a secret Booksanta at my new reading group, and I probably wouldn't have picked it up from a bookshelf myself, but I'm glad that I read it. As other readers have said, it was beautifully written. I didn't find it slow-paced as such, as much as paced to match Else's life on the Norwegian coast, both growing up and when she is a (fairly young, I think) grandmother. There were flurries of action, just as there are in life, when the pastor visits, when Else sneaks off, when she encounters other people, and in between life just goes on, and because of the way it's paced, you *feel* all of that.

I did wonder a little bit why I was reading it - or why I was being told the story - which is probably more about me than about the book. I kept reading because I felt we were building up to something, and I had various hopes about what it could be. There was a sense of foreboding throughout the ordinariness, somehow, so that I did want to know what was going to happen. Even though I had half an idea about what it was probably going to be, I needed to know for sure...

(view spoiler)

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### **Bookread2day says**

The Last Boat Home is Dea Brovig's very first novel and I look forward to further novels by Dea Brovig in the future. Author Dea Brovig moved to the UK from Norway at the age of seventeen. In The Last Boat Home Dea has set her story in the wind-swept southern coast of Norway. The story opens up Aliitle in the past January 1976 Else a year a year ago had caught a ferry after school. Now she knew the girls were sitting in their classrooms counting the minutes until break, while Else counted the seconds between the painful sharp contractions. More than thirty years later, the return of an old friend forces Else to relive the events that marked the end of her childhood. This is tale that vividly conjures up a Noregian community and its terrible secrets and repressions. The Last Boat Home is dark and tender, devastating, with sacrifice, survival and a mothers love. It is a beautiful novel and well worth reading. I am sure that book clubs will enjoy reading The Last Boat Home discussing the life of Else. I hope that many readers will enjoy reading The Last Boat Home as much as I have.

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### **Lili says**

An atmospheric novel set on the coast of Norway in 2009. When Else's life is turned upside down by the return of a past love, memories are awakened from 30 years before; thus in the telling and revealing of her story we comprehend how powerful the bond of love is between a mother and daughter. Very enjoyable read. I was pleased to receive this as a Goodreads First Read.

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## Emma says

I received a free copy of this book via netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

I struggled at the start of this book. It was a little confused and didn't hold my interest. But once I got into it, it was quite enjoyable, the story was good and it flowed well. I liked most of the characters, especially Else's granddaughter.

This book had strong themes of abuse, religions and heartache. It had some moments that were hard to read due to their subject nature but at the same moment you had to read on to find out what was happening.

Lars was a character I didn't particularly like. He was just plain rude and a little but creepy for my liking.

The book had some interesting ideas but it struggled to hold my attention.

I would recommend this book, just to people who prefer a slower paced books.

3 out of 5 stars.

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## Gretel says

*Else rested her temple against the cold glass and imagined how it would happen. A tearing of the guts, a hatching, a birth. Even now, it did not seem real. She knew girls who, at that moment, were sitting in their classrooms counting the minutes until break, while she tallied the seconds between her last contraction and the next.*

Dea Brøvig's atmospheric debut novel *The Last Boat Home* opens with a glimpse into Else's past as a pregnant teenager pacing the kitchen, preparing for birth. In the next chapter we switch to the present day where Else arrives in the harbour, grown-up and both a mother and a grandmother. Brøvig takes us back and forth in time, between 1974-6 and 2009 in a dual-time third person narrative. The novel has a gentle pace, not without tension, and Brøvig keeps the reader engaged as the pieces of the puzzle of Else's life are pieced together.

The writing is beautiful. You can tell every sentence has been pored over. Brøvig creates a realistic atmosphere of small town, God-fearing Norwegian life in the seventies. She writes well about a place where everybody knows everybody, gossip is rife and life sometimes feels suffocating. The scenery descriptions are great and the harsh but sometimes beautiful environment mirrors the feeling of a tight-knit community with its very ugly secrets below the surface.

The characterisation is strong and Else and her family have a lot of depth to them. They feel realistic. The dialogue doesn't feel wooden and Brøvig's characters for the most part have their own voice. I think Brøvig could do even more with these characters though; it would be great to read about Else's daughter Marianne and granddaughter Liv in a little more detail. A book about Marianne's childhood and how she then parented Liv would be an interesting read.

Overall, there's a lot packed into this relatively small novel and it will stay with you.

## **Mandy says**

Dea Brovig's debut novel is a haunting and atmospheric tale set in a small community on the south coast of Norway. It tells of the life of Else Dybdahl, growing up in the 1970s, and how her life is thrown into turmoil when a circus comes to town. In this dual-time narrative, we switch between 1974-6 and 2009, when we find out how the events of those early years changed Else's life for ever. Mirrored by the harsh environment, there's nothing cosy about this small village. The isolation, the repression of a strict and punitive religion, the pressures of a small community where nothing can be hidden except sometimes those things that should not be hidden, make this a gripping read. The gradual revelation of what has happened to Else is skilfully controlled, keeping the reader's interest fully engaged. With some powerful and vivid descriptions and very realistic and psychologically astute characterisation, this is an absorbing and thoroughly entertaining novel, which I very much enjoyed.

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## **Shirley says**

Set in a God fearing community in a small Norwegian coastal town. After a somewhat slow start, the story of Else and her family gradually develops in to a gripping tale of love, secrecy and sacrifice. Overall, it was a good read particularly for a debut novel.

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## **Becky says**

This is a beautiful and very moving book that conjures up the harshness of mid twentieth century rural Norwegian life with a sparcity of language and depth of feeling that is quite wonderful. The novel reminded me of Burial Rites in many ways both in the writing style and simply the harsh and restricted life described. The Last Boat is split into two sections one set during the mid 1970's and the other in 2009. It was both fascinating and slightly terrible to read about the restricted, misogynistic and brutal life of a period as recent as the 1970's. With life and family ruled with a rod of iron by the strictures of the church and paternal society. The story focuses on relationships between mothers and their daughters, relationships that are presented as being deeply flawed here. If we were to take our understanding of Scandinavia only from the literature that is translated into English then we would think that the whole place is populated by delinquent geriatrics and women hating brutes. This book would only add weight to that understanding of the region. Much of the abuse that Else suffers in this novel is reminiscent of storylines from Larsson's Millennium trilogy and from novels like Tom Rob Smith's The Farm. The Scandinavia presented here is brutal, unforgiving and a million miles away from the idea presented of the region being so much a perfect society.

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## **Caroline Southgate says**

A book that starts in present and then goes back to her as a girl. The life she led, her violent father. Set in

Norway on the coast, her dad was a trawlerman but had to find another job due to not enough work, he was a drunk too.

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## **Karen says**

The Last Boat Home is the debut novel of Dea Brovig and the narrative is shared between the mid-1970s and 2009. The novel opens with the lead character Else giving birth, and the circumstances behind this event, and the identity of the father of the child, is key in tying the two eras together.

The return of her childhood sweetheart Lars in 2009 forces Else to confront the past. Born into a strict church-going Norwegian fishing community, we learn of her early life, her relationship with Lars which they have kept secret, fearing condemnation from the community and in particular their parents and the village Pastor. A travelling circus arriving in the village and its inhabitants – the strong man in particular – have a considerable impact on her future life.

Else is not the only one hiding the truth. Her father is a not-so-secret drinker and her mother wears make-up to try to hide the bruises on her face from his frequent assaults. The discovery of Else's secret life causes the whole pack of cards to come tumbling down.

I love the idea behind this book. Somehow the book manages to be a fairly quick read but slow paced at the same time, and the pacing suits the descriptions of the somewhat monotonous and hard way of life described here. I enjoyed comparing how the village attitudes appear to have changed between the periods this book retells. It feels like it could have been set so much earlier than the 1970s.

(view spoiler)

Dea Brovig is a talented writer and this was a bleak but interesting read. I would recommend it. (On an unrelated note I have to point out that the cover is absolutely gorgeous)!

I received a copy of the book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

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