



Death and the Seaside

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With an abandoned degree behind her and a thirtieth birthday approaching, amateur writer Bonnie Falls moves out of her parents' home into a nearby flat. Her landlady, Sylvia Slythe, takes an interest in Bonnie, encouraging her to finish one of her stories, in which a young woman moves to the seaside, where she comes under strange influences. As summer approaches, Sylvia suggests to Bonnie that, as neither of them has anyone else to go on holiday with, they should go away together – to the seaside, perhaps.

The new novel from the author of the Man Booker-shortlisted *The Lighthouse* is a tense and moreish confection of semiotics, suggestibility and creative writing with real psychological depth and, in Bonnie Falls and Sylvia Slythe, two unforgettable characters.

Death and the Seaside Details

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From Reader Review Death and the Seaside for online ebook

Cathrine says

How do I write a review
that will not ruin the view
of this writing for you?

I was so confused at the onset.
It felt like a dream, pieces of a dream.
What had I read, what had I not read.
By who?
I felt great unease.

Turns out this is a good sign ;-).
I'm almost relieved.
My view is ok.

It is a mirror that looks into a mirror that looks into a mirror in a dream state.
A layer/reference/layer dream cake.

(She murdered time by pulling me back decades in time to Irvings 'under toad' by the sea side. Thank you :-)
. I love the under toad :-) !)

This author always murders time for me by being a page turner of beautiful writing.
I adore to reflect on her work, mirror mirror, as I rest by the sea side.
Layer, layer, layer I read every word she writes :-). This time that was a triple experience

I give up ... I can't review this.
It has to be experienced :-) !

Enjoy the view enjoy the view

PS: some people go very far in order for you to fit into their view reviewer whispers: this is a 5 star experience.

Imi says

Wow! A short novel that's deceptively simple beginnings and writing style hide a complex and compelling page turner. The triumph here is in the details that form a story within a story, and the clever blurring of both fiction and reality. My favourite read of the year so far and one I'd love to write more on, but don't know how to discuss without giving too much away. I went into this knowing basically nothing about it and it completely took me by surprise. Definitely one I think others should experience themselves!

David Harris says

When I was a child we would make family visits to Wallasey, the town the other side of the Mersey from Liverpool, where my mother's family came from. Sometimes we'd go to New Brighton, the seaside bit of Wallasey. It's probably been tidied up now but in the 70s it was a wonderful example of a tawdry, decaying seafront. The pier had gone, but there was a boating lake, a shabby amusement arcade ("The Bright Spot"), fish and chip shops, and a windswept promenade.

So at an impressionable age my image of the British seaside took a murky turn. That may explain why I picked up this book with its rain spattered cover and retro lettering when I saw it in the shop.

And immediately, we're at the seaside, a down at heel resort in the late summer. Susan arrives on her motorbike and takes a room over a pub, working in the bar and living apparently on crisps. She spends her time in the arcade losing money and drifting along the seafront smoking.

Then she begins receiving strange notes which might be telling her to "fail" - or might be blank.

Meanwhile, in a nameless inland town, perhaps in the Midlands, Bonnie, a disappointment to her parents, moves out of her their house and into a scuzzy flat - the sort of place where the carpet doesn't quite fit and previous tenants' belongings fill the cupboard. Bonnie has a couple of cleaning jobs, between which she tries to write. Her new landlady Sadie takes an interest in Bonnie's life and writing (indeed, something of an obsession) and pushes her towards completing her story.

Bonnie and Susan are alike in many ways - aimless, fixated on failure (but failure at what?) and there begin to be echoes between their stories. 'Susan' is Bonnie's middle name. Like Susan, Bonnie drifts between jobs, leaving when she can't be bothered any more: she's currently cleaning at an amusement arcade and at a lab that may or may not experiment on animals. Here she fall under the influence of Fiona, who begins to set her dares. Bonnie seems both innately suggestible and unlucky (a repeated motif is her being late for a meal, ending up with having nothing to eat) but also at some deeper level trying hard to control her life (she has shelves of self-help books, which she's read, though none completely).

As Susan tries to work out who the mysterious notes are from, and what they mean, Sadie suggests to Bonnie that they go away to - where else - the seaside. Sadie's convinced that the resort in Bonnie's book is a real place, and that going there will provide the inspiration needed to complete the story. It begins to look as though Bonnie's and Susan's stories will come together somehow.

This is a wonderful, tricky, tart book, full of sly observations and self-commentary. Books about writers writing books make me wary, but this one really zings along. Bonnie, Susan and Sadie are wonderful characters - real, believable women. Bonnie is, we are more or less told, doomed to be a failure because she keeps being told she's going to fail. Her mother knows this, but it doesn't stop her snapping at Bonnie: her father is even worse (to be fair, he's not just nasty to her but to women in general: the TV goes off because even though it's the Wimbledon final it's only "the ladies"). There's something mysterious about Susan, and as for Sadie - well, I wouldn't actually want to meet her but she's a totally fascinating person.

As the story gets more complicated and begins to fold plot strand around plot strand, we also get the viewpoint of a psychological researcher, who was involved in some very strange experiments around suggestion and subliminal messaging - a central theme of the book - but, it seems, went too far in some way and was dismissed. There's a parallel with Bonnie's abandoned degree: we see fragments of Bonnie's abandoned dissertation, exploring the "meaning" of the seaside as a place where water and land, life and death, come together.

In many respects it's a map for this book. Sadie is probably right that the story will only come to its conclusion there - the only problem with that is, characters in stories have a way of doing the unexpected.

This is a lovely book from Salt, at once filled with penetrating observations and also, vaguely, diffusely, horrific. A story of manipulation, obsession and baffled intentions it'll haunt you the next time you hear gulls cry or the sound of rain on a seafront window.

William Koon says

Ever watch a movie that was not very good, but you really wanted to look at the credits to see the music or where it was made or who played a minor character? I think *Death and the Seaside* is the only fictional work I have ever read where the credits were more interesting than the narrative.

It's about Bonnie, who may be Susan, who Bonnie is writing about, but not really because she can't finish the story. Get it? It's metafiction. It's DuMaurier with a taste of unheimlich. Is it a tale of a disorienting mind or a ghost story?

The reader goes, "Who really cares?" I thoroughly enjoyed Alison Moore's first novel *The Lighthouse*. However, one cannot approach the novel seriously with the "gotcha" ending, with everyone like in *Archie* and *Veronica* laughing uproariously because all of the problems have been puzzled out. Or in this case thrown in our face. The mysterious Sylvia is.... Yeah, I kinda figured that one out.

The whole metaphor of the English seaside in *Death and the Seaside* was done better by David Essex in *That'll Be the Day*. And any resemblance to *Death in Venice* or homage to *Death and the Maiden*...ah, just let it go.

Anni says

This spellbinding psychodrama, full of literary allusion and symbolism, draws on many influences. Don't be fooled by the deceptively simple writing style: the story within a story, the blurring of fiction and reality, and the sinister undercurrents in the relationship between the easily influenced Bonnie and Sylvia, her mysterious landlady, which all conspire to baffle and unsettle the reader till all the hidden clues cleverly converge.

Anne Goodwin says

How could I not love a novel about reading and writing, about the boundary between fact and fiction, and about maverick psychology? Overall, however it's a novel about semiotics, and the sometimes subliminal messages of symbols is the glue holds it all together.

Full review <http://annegoodwin.weebly.com/annecdo...>

Jackie Law says

Death and the Seaside, by Alison Moore, introduces the reader to two women whose lives overlap with devastating results.

Bonnie is approaching her thirtieth birthday but her life has been stunted, much to the frustration of her overbearing parents who regard their daughter as clumsy and incapable. Her mother is constantly impatient with her daughter. Her father systematically puts her down. When they require her to move out of the family home she finds a small flat in a converted house owned by Sylvia, an enigmatic landlady who starts to take an invasive interest in the detail of Bonnie's life.

Bonnie is an aspiring writer. She is well read and studied English Literature at university. Having dropped out in her final year she did not graduate and now works as a cleaner. She is not the most reliable of employees, struggling to find work and rarely holding down any job for long.

The book opens with a chapter from Bonnie's latest story. She starts many stories but takes none to completion. It soon becomes clear that her stories are variations and reflections of her own life.

Sylvia mentions early on that she had met Bonnie and her mother when Bonnie was a child but does not elaborate. She offers little of her own background, the burgeoning friendship being one way and controlling. Bonnie has few friends and welcomes attention from whatever source.

Sylvia reads Bonnie's latest story and encourages her to write more. When Bonnie is unable to tell her the planned ending she suggests that they take a holiday at the setting of the tale, a seaside town Bonnie visited as a child, in order to generate inspiration. Bonnie is excited to be taking a holiday with a friend despite her accommodation requests being ignored.

A sinister undercurrent pervades the tale. On the surface it is a variation on the theme of a lonely young woman who is influenced by a stronger personality. Lurking unsaid is what Sylvia wants from Bonnie and why.

The pleasure of reading is in the detail: Bonnie's apparent acceptance of her oppressive existence; her relationship with work colleagues, young men, her constantly critical parents. Bonnie appears adrift in the world. Her knowledge of literature and the intelligence this suggests belying the current state of her life.

As Sylvia's background is revealed the plot takes a sinister turn. The reader is left with much to ponder about influences, known and unknown.

At 160 pages this is not a long read. For the size of the work it packs a mighty, subversive punch.

My copy of this book was provided gratis by the publisher, Salt.

Benny says

Death and the Seaside is a clever, little novel about fear of falling, the fragility of limbs and the sometimes fatal attraction of the English seaside.

Just like her debut novel *The Lighthouse*, this one is highly readable, well-constructed and touches upon some remarkable insights, yet it is not the kind of novel to change lives or make a really lasting impression.

The two central characters are memorable, but far too sketchy. Short as it is, the novel includes a mass of

references to groundbreaking, but controversial psychology experiments of old and to the sea as a literary theme. Although the connection with the story is obvious, one wonders what exactly the writer is trying to prove in these chapters.

In the finale Moore generates a considerable amount of suspense by that good old Hitchcock-like ploy of supplying the reader with (essential) information that the central character lacks. There and then, the book really does take off, but only moments later it is finished already.

Death and the Seaside is an entertaining read for a quiet evening in, but I'm still waiting for that really great Alison Moore novel.

Julian Gilder says

This is the third book I have read by this author. It is a light psychological thriller. I really enjoyed it - along with her other books. She writes in a deceptively simple style, but has a great eye for description and characterisation. She is one of those authors I feel sure I will have a look at everything she writes. If you liked *Lighthouse* you are sure to similarly enjoyed this novella.

If you have not read anything she has written - give it a go.

Blair says

Review originally published at Nudge.

Bonnie Falls is a university drop-out and aspiring writer who feels she has never quite amounted to anything. Perhaps appropriately, given her name, she has a fear of falling or jumping from a great height – from a window or, as she once attempted as a little girl, from a pier. In fact, it might be more accurate to say she has an obsession with falling or jumping; it is a theme she frequently returns to in both her thoughts and her fiction.

With her thirtieth birthday on the horizon, Bonnie makes a somewhat half-hearted attempt to renew her life. She leaves her parents' house and moves into a basement flat (the attic available in the same building would, naturally, be unsuitable). In this twilight place, filled with previous occupants' left-behind belongings, she finds a source of inspiration when she is befriended by her landlady. But, as it turns out, the fabulously-named Sylvia Slythe is not all she seems...

Death and the Seaside is uncommonly simple in its telling, weaving a particular, peculiar kind of magic from everyday details. Bonnie's days are uneventful, her existence devoid of excitement and colour. She has two part-time cleaning jobs, and acquaintances rather than friends. She doesn't really have relationships, at least not many, and not for long: 'she was never, it seemed, quite anyone's type'. This is not, outwardly, the stuff of rousing fiction; Bonnie's own stories and Sylvia's analysis of her would seem to be the exciting parts. But some authors have a gift for making these plain routines incredibly compelling, and Moore is surely one of the best. Although Bonnie's observations often seem to be little more than banalities, the writing makes them fascinating and the pacing had me turning the pages eagerly. As the story neared its end, I found myself revolted by one character's behaviour, yet still my feverish attachment to the book persisted.

This is a story of manipulation, but it is also a story of imagination, as much about the creative process as it

is about the characters. Each section begins with an extract from the story Sylvia is encouraging Bonnie to finish; it's about a girl named Susan, who is clearly an avatar of Bonnie, though she does things Bonnie cannot or would not (for example, she lives in an attic room). Literary references are abundant; both characters frequently use novels, as well as films and music and psychological studies, to help them understand their own context. Moore prompts the reader to muse on the overlap between Bonnie's fiction and her reality. How much is one influencing the other? How much is Sylvia influencing Bonnie, both in her everyday behaviour and her story-writing? And what is it that Sylvia wants from her unlikely protégé?

Moore's masterful blend of genres and influences makes her third novel feel, as many great novels do, quite unlike anything else I've read. In entwining Bonnie and Sylvia's tales, *Death and the Seaside* delves deep into its characters' psyches; the result is quiet and brilliant, unsettling yet thoughtful, dreamlike and thrilling.

I received an advance review copy of Death and the Seaside from Nudge. I wasn't paid for this review and I was under no obligation to be anything other than honest about what I thought of the book.

Further notes:

- I was excited to realise that the 'Susan' story is a reworked version of Moore's Nightjar Press chapbook, *The Harvestman*. A creepy, gloomy seaside setting also appears in 'Eastmouth' (*The Spectral Book of Horror Stories*). I added Moore's short story collection to my wishlist halfway through – I'd love to know if these themes pervade more of her work. I might even have another crack at *The Lighthouse*.
 - Bonnie's narrative – that is to say, most of the book – reminded me strongly of Alice Furse's *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* in the way it makes the mundane fascinating and fantastic.
 - If I was the sort of person who ever actually got round to doing rereads, this is a book I would read again. I have a feeling that reading it a second time would make for a completely different experience.
-

Sarah says

This book just really didn't do anything for me. The premise was sort of interesting but I don't think it was executed in an interesting enough way. I didn't care about any of the characters and the writing style felt kind of simplistic and sparse, which I get was probably intentional but it just meant it was kind of dull to read. Bleh.

Wendy Greenberg says

Didn't like it...then I did.. A spiders web of deceptions and stories within stories, past and present all coalescing. Or is it simpler of more complex? For a short novel this had me in a page turning spin. Every character is irritating and yet the devil is in the descriptive detail.

I was there in this story or its parallel reality and/or fictions. The book ends suddenly but just in the right way, half-expected yet completely unexpected. Haunting and deceptively dense. Feel it will continue to slap me around the face for a while to come!

Josh Ang says

At one point in this charming yet quietly unsettling novel, a pivotal character, Sylvia says: "Dreams rarely have proper endings.... They just move on or suddenly stop, like life." And just like this apt observation,

fiction and reality are superimposed on one another in protagonist Bonnie's life as she steps in and out of the stories she writes.

We are introduced to her by way of her story's character, Susan, a teenager who escapes from home to work in a pub in a sleepy seaside village. Bonnie, though she is on the brink of her thirtieth birthday, shares many similarities and almost symmetrical contrasts with Susan, and we suspect even early on that the story she is writing is autobiographical.

Bonnie is a deceptively placid character, because of her acceptance of failure - she has dropped out of courses and third rate universities, slipping in and out of dead end jobs (her latest a cleaner in a medical facility), and is all but forced to move out of her parents' home to move to a groundfloor unit in an old house situated along the eerily named Slash Lane. But she betrays an intelligent mind through the notes of an abandoned dissertation that explores the sea and its connection with death, which belies her vacuous demeanour. Bonnie is such a passive character she just lets whatever rubbish left off by previous tenants overrun her rooms without protest. We soon find out that she has had strange childhood experiences of jumping off piers into the sea, which goes against the grain of the adult Bonnie we know, who is more likely to organise a birthday dinner for which her presence is optional and secondary to the paltry handful of guests made up of her detached parents, a surly work acquaintance, and her landlady Sylvia. Only Sylvia takes a keen interest in her writing, and the exchanges between them take on an insidiously creepy edge as the novel progresses, and Bonnie just lets her take control of her.

Moore plays a deft hand at calmly spinning a layered narrative that is understated in its psychological suspense as it unfolds, which gives this work an undefinable quality, much like its exploration of the transgression of fiction and reality.

Royce Houthuijzen says

Alison Moore's writing pulls you into the story quickly as you become drawn to the characters' lives immediately. I read this story sitting on the edge of my sofa, biting my nails, anxiously anticipating the twists and turns. As in her other work, all the minor details become important or relevant as the story unfolds. I highly recommend this book and all of Alison Moore's other novels.

Belinda says

I didn't get it at all. Tons of OTT plaudits on prelims are a bad sign, I've decided. I found the narrative pedestrian, bordering on turgid, repetitive and dull. Couldn't really warm to the main character, which is a bit of a drawback. And tired of sentences like 'She climbed into bed, and went to sleep'. Who cares?
