



## Call of the Curlew

*Elizabeth Brooks*

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*Virginia Wrathmell has always known she will meet her death on the marsh in reparation for the mistakes of her childhood.*

On New Year's Eve, at the age of eighty-six, Virginia feels the time has finally come.

In 1939, Virginia is ten, an orphan arriving to meet her new adoptive parents, Clem and Lorna Wrathmell, at their mysterious house, Salt Winds. The house sits right on the edge of a vast marsh, a beautiful but dangerous place. It's the start of a new life for Virginia, but she quickly senses that all is not right between Clem and Lorna - in particular, the presence of their wealthy neighbour Max Deering, who takes an unhealthy interest in the family. When a German fighter plane crashes into the marsh, Clem ventures onto the deadly sands to rescue the airman. And that is when things really begin to go wrong...

## Call of the Curlew Details

Date : Published June 28th 2018 by Doubleday

ISBN : 9780857525581

Author : Elizabeth Brooks

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, Mystery, European Literature, British Literature, War, World War II, Young Adult, Coming Of Age

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## From Reader Review Call of the Curlew for online ebook

### **Lisa says**

I bought this book solely on the beauty of its cover. I knew nothing else about it apart from the information contained within the short blurb on the back, which made it sound intriguing enough. And it was intriguing, for the most part. The writing style was assured. The jumps between 2015 and the time of the Second World War were well handled. It had a couple of interesting characters. It had a fairly strong sense of time and place. It had some gothic undertones. It was atmospheric. In other words, all the ingredients were in place for this to be a book I really enjoyed, maybe even loved. Unfortunately, things didn't pan out that way. I liked it well enough, don't get me wrong, but I was left somewhat disappointed. The whole thing just felt a bit flat to me. Despite a couple of the characters (the main ones) being well realised, I never felt like I was able to connect to them as much as I would have liked. I felt like something was holding me back from them, yet I can't quite put my finger on what it was. Also, the big secret which is teased in the blurb as having changed the course of the main character's life, came across as a bit "much ado about nothing". I'm not saying what happened was nice because it wasn't, but was it really enough to haunt her for the rest of her life, and to make her take the course of action that she did at the end? I personally don't think it was. I think part of the problem was that the blurb seemed to promise so much more than the book actually delivered. I was expecting a huge tragedy or a dark, sinister mystery, yet I didn't really get either of them. The book flirted with both, but that's as far it went. It's a shame because on paper this could, and should, have been a book that I ended up raving about. Instead it joins my list of books that were good but certainly not great. It kept me wanting to turn the pages but I don't think it will linger on long in my memory. It should be noted that this is Elizabeth Brooks' debut novel and I will be looking out for future work from her, despite this one's flaws, as I think she has great potential.

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### **Diane S ? says**

Virginia arrives at Salt Winds when she is ten, adopted by Clem and Lorna. She and Clem form an immediate connection, her relationship with Lorna has a much slower start. Clem entertains her with both warnings and stories of the marsh. I loved the closeness between them, it added a heartwarming element to the story. The marsh also plays an integral part, it is where a strange occurrence will cause much heartache, and provide an element of mystery. There are strange things happening at Salt Winds, not only conversations she overhears, but also from a neighbor, a Mr. Derring her seems to have a strange hold over Lorna, and wanting something from Virginia that she has no intention of giving. Creepy man.

Dual storylines, past and present, the past on the eve of WWI and in the present when Virginia is in her eighties, still at Salt Winds. Her intention to at last leave is fraught with signs and the arrival of a young girl, a reminder of the past. I found the past story much more interesting and the connection with the older Virginia, for me did not work. Just didn't seem like we get to know her very well, felt this part was both rushed, and the intervening years given short shift. Although there are some Gothic elements, mostly in the atmosphere of the past story, with the marsh, and the tensions and secrets will the house, the past really didn't keep up with that tone. It seems this novel tried to be many things, we even get a fairytale, it didn't completely work. Key elements just didn't ring true, and other elements were predictable, could definitely see them coming. This was an entertaining read, but could have been much more.

ARC from Edelweiss and Tin House books.

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### **Jessica says**

I received an ARC of this book for free from the publisher (Tin House Books) in exchange for an honest review.

I give this book 3.5 stars which rounds up to 4.

This was an incredibly atmospheric read. The setting, particularly the marsh, had a life of its own. The author did a fabulous job describing the setting which helped set the tone and the mood for the novel.

As for the story itself, I was into it, but I wasn't thrilled by it. I think it was because I had such high expectations going in. On the cover, the book is described as being reminiscent of Jane Eyre, which is one of my all time favorite books. It's really tough to top that book. As I was reading the book, it was hard not to compare it to Jane Eyre. The story just didn't move me as much as I would have liked it to. I never felt that connected to Virginia.

I did like the dual storylines of Virginia when she was adopted (which was the main storyline) and Virginia as an old woman. I think the alternation between the two were really well done. The author coordinated the unfolding of events between the two perfectly. The contemporary chapter would subtly reveal something that the next historical chapter would delve into in great detail.

For me, the strongest part of the book was Mr. Deering. He was a fearsome villain. I never knew what he was going to do because he was so unpredictable and creepy. It was so unsettling every time he entered Salt Winds. He's one of the best villains I've encountered in literature this year.

Overall, this book has a fantastic setting and villain, but the story leaves more to be desired.

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### **KC says**

In 1939 ten-year-old Virginia is adopted by Clem and Lorna. Virginia and Clem soon fall in sync with their unfamiliar role as father and daughter. Her world is quickly upended when Clem fails to return home after he sets out towards the marsh scouting for a downed German fighter plane. Traveling from past to present, this atmospheric and beautifully told tale exquisitely captures the scents, sights, and mood of an English marsh. Bewitching, hypnotic, and simply sublime. Perfect for book clubs.

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### **Stacey A. Prose and Palate says**

Incredibly atmospheric but the ending was quite underwhelming.

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## **Bill Kupersmith says**

The Orphan of Salt Winds was previously published in England as *Call of the Curlew*, a title that also plays a role in the story itself. Following the rule for literary scholars and bibliographers, I shall refer to the book by its original title. I wondered what other changes the American editors introduced to justify their presence, but it's likely that the 'flashlight' that plays rather a role in the story was really a "torch" and that the odious Mr. Deering's Austin 12 had a "bonnet," not a "hood." But the setting remains the low-lying coast of East Anglia with its treacherous tides and dangerous currents. These also are crucial to the story, and attracted me as a reader. Having enjoyed many happy times sailing from West Mersea in my younger days, I was eager to revisit the location.

This is a two-track narrative. The backstory takes place at the beginning of the Second World War and unfolds over two years. Virginia, an eleven-year-old orphan girl, has been adopted by Clem and Lorna Wrathmell (a name that seems simultaneously ominous and homely) and come to live at an old house on the coast, Salt Winds. The contemporary narrative is set on New Year's Eve, 2015, as the aged Victoria contemplates adventuring into the marsh for the last time.

Clem is a nature writer living in a perfect location; Lorna is a children's book illustrator. Virginia and Clem immediately form a strong bond, but there seems a tension with Lorna. There is also the officious well-off neighbor Mr. Deering, a widower with daughter Juliet and her obnoxious younger sibling Theodore. Not only does Mr. Deering's interest in Lorna seem sinister and obsessive, but he attempts unsuitable familiarities with Virginia. Juliet is an early victim of the German raids when a bomb obliterates her railway carriage as she was returning to school. On the night of 31st December 1940, Virginia sees through the window a German fighter aircraft crash into the marsh. Even if the pilot survived, he would surely drown. But Clem, confident in his knowledge and experience, takes a rope and torch to try to rescue the downed enemy pilot if he is still alive. Clem never returns, but Virginia never loses hope that he somehow survived and faithfully awaits his return. Best stop here with the plot to avoid spoilers.

I confess some disappointment with *Call of the Curlew*, though I think it's not undeserving of the high praise it has received from readers such as Claire Fuller. It is a very slow boiler even though it has a thriller climax that I didn't find quite believable—this villain never would have had the nerve actually to shoot anyone. And what some might term the "big reveal" most readers will see coming from afar. I don't mind that—the best books are those you can read again after you know the plot. But I don't think *Call of the Curlew* is one. And though a mysterious child is introduced from out of the night to give us some gothic frisson, and the setting so recalls *The Woman In Black*, I was just never scared, not even a little bit. I shall be watching out for future books by Elizabeth Brooks, but this one didn't quite come together for me. The ingredients of plot, character and setting represent the best traditions of the classical English ghost story, but the dish seemed bland and overcooked.

I am grateful to Galley Club for the favor of a gratis copy in exchange for my review.

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## **Jennifer ~ TarHeelReader says**

In England, it's 1939, and ten-year-old Virginia has been adopted by a couple who live in an isolated house on the edge of a marsh. Her new parents are Clem and Lorna, and what a pair they are. Their marriage is a temperamental one with dark secrets, and Virginia quickly becomes aware of this though she cannot fully

understand.

Clem becomes an ally and bonds with Virginia, but otherwise, there's a nosy neighbor and moody Lorna. One day a German fighter airman crashes into the marsh, and Clem rescues him...What follows is a crime that haunts Virginia the rest of her life.

Many years later, Virginia returns to the marsh in search of healing, and she finds it in the form of a teenage girl with secrets of her own.

The landscape is beautifully drawn, and I could see and smell the marsh. There's an engaging mystery at the heart of the story and a true gothic, atmospheric feel. I overall enjoyed the story, but I wished for a little more- more character development and more atmosphere across both timelines. It's a positive that I wanted more because I was invested, but I also was left wanting more like it could have been just a smidge more to be a more fleshed out story. Elizabeth Brooks' talent shines, and I'm looking forward to her next effort.

Thank you to the publisher for the complimentary copy. All opinions are my own.

My reviews can also be found on my blog: [www.jennifertarheelreader.com](http://www.jennifertarheelreader.com)

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### **Bonnie Brody says**

I saw Eowyn Ivey's blurb on the cover of this book and, since I loved her novel 'The Snow Child', I thought I'd take a chance. I was very disappointed however, because though the book was atmospheric and the setting was bleak, the story was bland, slow and boring. It goes back and forth in time from pre-World War II and the World War II era to the present.

The book opens with Virginia, age 86, finally having found a sign that tells her it is time to take her life. The sign is the skull of a Curlew, a bird found in the marshland which is near her house. Her plan is interrupted by the unforeseen appearance of a young girl who is a stranger to her.

The early timeline takes place in 1939 and Clem is in the process of taking nine year old Virginia home from her orphanage. On their way home, they meet an acquaintance of Clem's named Max Deering and Clem appears uptight. Max offers to give Clem and Virginia a ride home because they still have quite a ways to walk but Clem declines his offer. When they arrive home, Clem's wife Lorna appears not that excited about Virginia's arrival.

As time progresses, Virginia begins to hear her new parents arguing, often in whispers, and usually about Max Deering. The ambience in the home is stressful and filled with secrets. Clem is a wildlife writer and an expert on birds. Virginia and Clem become very close though Lorna and Virginia have quite an emotional distance between them.

It is apparent that something happened in the past that made Virginia feel guilty enough to take her life as an old woman and, as the book progresses, bits of the secret are very slowly revealed; much too slowly for me.

I found the book repetitive and filled with portents of things to come. Stress and tension build but the pace is indolent and creeps along throughout. The style is gothic noir which I usually enjoy but I was unable to feel

like I really knew any of the characters.

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### **Pamela says**

2.5 stars I have to admit that I was a little let down with this one. It had real promise of being a Gothic English tale, but fell flat. It did have a bit of the atmospheric feel of the marsh, but the story itself was a bit bland. I would have liked for Virginia to be a little more developed. This is a dual timeline and the present storyline seemed a bit thrown together - we get a "mysterious child" showing up on Virginia's doorstep who I don't think really added anything to the story. Overall, just a bit of a letdown for me.

\*\*Thank you to the publisher and Net Galley in exchange of an honest review.\*\*

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### **Cathy says**

Somehow it doesn't seem quite right that I've been reading *Call of the Curlew* sitting in my garden in the bright sunshine. The atmosphere of the book is such that it seems more suited to misty autumn nights, with the rain lashing down outside and the wind rattling the window panes. Throw in some creaking floorboards, some footsteps in the attic and your reading experience would be complete.

Told in chapters that alternate between 2015 and the early years of the Second World War, *Call of the Curlew* has a haunting, mysterious quality. Salt Winds, the old house at which orphan Virginia arrives in 1939 to join her adoptive parents, Lorna and Clem, occupies an isolated position on the marshes at the end of a long lane.

The author really gets inside the mind of ten-year old Virginia. Initially, she's concerned that she might be a disappointment to Lorna and Clem and be sent back to the orphanage (although she doesn't think they do sale and return). Virginia doesn't understand everything she sees and hears in the house but she's sensitive to the tension she detects between Lorna and Clem. 'Virginia liked it when they discussed everyday things: pots of tea and food prices and what needed doing in the garden. It made them sound peaceful and close. Anything bigger or more personal and they were on edge, like a couple of cats.' Underlying everything, there's an air of mystery, of secrets and things that can't be spoken about.

Virginia also has a child's literal interpretation of Clem's warnings about the perils of setting foot on the marsh and the dangers that wait because of the shifting tides. Virginia forms a touching relationship with Clem who seems better able to communicate with a child than Lorna. Virginia's relationship with Lorna is strained; Lorna always remains slightly distant and less openly affectionate. Virginia has also acquired an acute sense of how to deal with certain situations: 'Shutting up was almost always a clever move, she'd discovered, not just with Clem but with everyone. People rarely object to a quiet child.'

From the very first time, Max Deering, a childhood friend of Clem, visits Salt Winds, ten-year old Virginia takes an instinctive dislike to him, sensing something unsettling about him she can't put into words. Her view of Max can't help but affect the reader's view of him, especially as the manner of his arrivals at the house conjured up thoughts for me of Mrs Danvers gliding in and out of shot in Hitchcock's film version of *Rebecca*. Virginia muses: 'It was difficult to explain the car's pull on her imagination – not without

sounding silly – but there was something about its predatory grace that made it seem like a living thing. The lane from Tollbury Point to Salt Winds was pitted with holes and bumps, but Mr Deering’s Austin 12 never seemed to mind. It just glided forwards, silent and slow, the way a shark glides over the ocean floor.’

I loved the author’s evocative, imaginative descriptions and eye for the smallest details when depicting a scene. For example, as Virginia makes meticulous plans in response to what she believes is the sign she’s been waiting for, ‘She pictures the house, room by room, and plots the route of her farewell tour, mentally circling certain parts and crossing others out.’ Don’t you just love the idea of the ‘farewell tour’. Or this description of the kitchen table: ‘The old tabletop rolled between them like a parchment map, grainy with longitude lines and knotty islands and uncharted territories.’ I can almost feel that under my fingers.

As the book progresses, it becomes apparent that some sort of tragedy occurred at Salt Winds which has haunted Virginia for the rest of her life and for which she feels, justifiably or not, responsible and for which she is convinced she will someday be called to make amends. The enjoyment for the reader is finding out exactly the nature of the tragic event and the consequences that follow.

I thought the book was fabulous. To my mind, in Call of the Curlew, Elizabeth Brooks gives Susan Hill (think The Woman in Black) and Sarah Waters (think The Little Stranger) a run for their money when it comes to creating a creepy, unsettling atmosphere. I was also reminded at times of Daphne du Maurier’s Rebecca, and there is no higher praise in my book (pardon the pun).

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### **Joanna Park says**

There’s nothing I like better than a dual timeline mystery and Call Of The Curlew is definitely one of the best I have read.

The book is very atmospheric with the descriptions of the bleak, eerie marshes adding to the feeling that anything could happen. The bleakness seems to creep in side the house and affect the people living there, making them act very strangely at times.

The reader is aware almost from the start that something is not quite right with the house and the situation but is largely kept in the dark about what it might be. The facts are slowly and tantalisingly revealed as the story unfolds in a way that is very well done by the author. I was very intrigued and wanted to keep reading to find out what was going to happen.

The characters are very well created and developed well throughout the book. I’m not sure if I particularly warmed to any of them though I did feel sorry for them and the situation they find themselves in. Virginia was an interesting character very astute and capable one moment but very childlike at other times, even when she’s an 85 year old. She obviously adored Clem which was very touching to see and her pain over what happened is very palpable, I did really feel for her then. Max Deering is a great characters as he is very unlikeable and smarmy at times. I wanted him to get his comeuppance and not get the ending he obviously wanted.

This is Elizabeth Brooks’s debut book and I really can’t wait to read more from her in the future. If you like atmospheric, dual timeline mysteries with some great characters you’ll love this book. I felt this book was similar in style to The Taxidermist by Kate Mosse so if you liked that book I think you’ll enjoy this one.

Huge thanks to Anne Cater for inviting me onto the blog tour and to Hannah Bright for my copy this book. This is definitely going on my keep forever shelf!

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### **Jaclyn (sixminutesforme) says**

I devoured the majority of this novel in one sitting, and was utterly hooked very early in!

Set on an a marsh in England, this was super atmospheric and chilling. We're following an historic timeline during World War Two in which young orphan Virginia comes to live at Salt Winds with Clem and Lorna. The narrative picks up after a German plane crashes in the marsh, and alternating with this pacy series of events is a narrative 75 years later following Virginia as she again is drawn to the marsh. This one was about an historical crime, a chance at retribution, and the legacy of family drama.

It was gothic and just so incredibly well written, with near perfect pacing - I was pleasantly surprised to see this is a debut novel! I'll definitely be on the lookout for what Brooks writes next!

Thanks to @tin\_house for sending an ARC my way. ?????

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### **Penny (Literary Hoarders) says**

Truly, a 3.5 star book.

Atmospheric at times, too loose in others and I felt the switches from 1941 to 2015 were too quick, so did not allow for real meaty development of the suspense or of the story - of Virginia's story and very loose and not a strong sense to the *"What happens next is something Virginia will regret for the next seventy-five years, and which will change the whole course of her life."*

Because, truly, it doesn't happen "next" and there isn't a strong development of changing the course of her whole life - because that is never fully discussed or developed. It comes about at the very, very end of the book, so definitely not regrets we hear of over the seventy-five years. Am I babbling? Not making sense?

It was a good story, a good debut, but there were a few wobbles for me, or too many loose developments/not fleshed out as much as I would have thought there should/would be - there is an overall sense of just that little something is missing to really pull this together to be a strong 4-star read.

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### **Rona says**

What a beautiful book - both inside and out this is a little masterpiece and something which will have a special place on my bookshelves.

It tells the story of Virginia, an orphan who was adopted by a couple who lived in a big old house on the marshes. The book gives us a mystery - why does 86 year-old Virginia think she will meet her death on the marshes and what is the sign that tells her now is the time? The story is then told in alternating now and then chapters to great effect, giving us suspense and mystery, feeding snippets of information one crumb at a

time.

I loved every minute of this story, it was so well written, the descriptions so clear that I was there in that big old house. I was the child and the old lady. It was brilliant! And such believable characters, especially Max Deering, who was such a creepy, horrible man I could hardly bear to read about him.

Five stars and more from me!

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**Christine says**

3.5-4 stars

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