



The Whole World

Emily Winslow

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At once a sensual and irresistible mystery and a haunting work of psychological insight and emotional depth, *The Whole World* marks the beginning of a brilliant literary career for Emily Winslow, a superb, limitlessly gifted author.

Set in the richly evoked pathways and environs of Cambridge, England, *The Whole World* unearths the desperate secrets kept by its many complex characters—students, professors, detectives, husbands, mothers—secrets that lead to explosive consequences.

Two Americans studying at Cambridge University, Polly and Liv, both strangers to their new home, both survivors of past mistakes, become quick friends. They find a common interest in Nick, a handsome, charming, seemingly guileless graduate student. For a time, the three engage in harmless flirtation, growing closer while doing research for professor Gretchen Paul, the blind daughter of a famed novelist. But a betrayal, followed by Nick's inexplicable disappearance, brings long-buried histories to the surface.

The investigation raises countless questions, and the newspapers report all the most salacious details—from the crime that scars Polly's past to the searing truths concealed in photographs Gretchen cannot see. Soon the three young lovers will discover how little they know about one another, and how devastating the ripples of long-ago actions can be.

The Whole World Details

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From Reader Review The Whole World for online ebook

Dan Schwent says

Polly and Liv are Americans studying abroad in Cambridge. When Nick, a friend of theirs, goes missing, The Whole World turns upside down. Is Nick still alive? And does his disappearance have to do with what happened between him and the girls? That's what Morris Keene and Chloe Frohmann mean to find out!

Yeah, I fudged the teaser a little bit. That's the book I was imagining when I picked this up. Look For Her was part of one of my Pagehabit boxes and I liked it quite a bit. While I liked this one, it was not the same kind of book.

The Whole World is a character study in four parts that happens to feature a mysterious disappearance. Polly, Liv, and Nick are all working on a project, sorting a blind woman's photos, when Nick disappears after some romantic misunderstandings with Polly and Liv. The story is told in four points of view: first Polly's, then Nick's, then Morris', and finally Liv's. Each tale reveals more of Nick's disappearance and the events surrounding it.

Now that I write it out, I liked the structure of the book quite a bit. Instead of being linear, the narrative curves back in on itself quite a bit. Honestly, there's not a lot of sleuthing to be done. Nick's fate is revealed early and the shit doesn't really hit the fan until late in the book.

I understand now why Emily Winslow doesn't call this a series, precisely. While Morris and Chloe are characters in this book, they are secondary to Liv, Polly, and Nick. While the story wasn't what I expected, the book was very well written. I'm a little on the fence about reading the second and third book, although I'm interested in what happens to Morris' marriage and daughter and Chloe's future.

The Whole World wasn't what I expected but I still enjoyed it. Three out of five stars.

Morgan F says

When I won this on firstreads, I got excited. It looked really good.

Polly and Liv, two American friends at Cambridge University, both find themselves for Nick, the perfect English guy. The three work together on doing research for a blind professor named Gretchen Paul, who wants to write a book about her mother, a famous author. But one day Nick disappears and in the aftermath, secrets come bubbling to the surface.

I was not a big fan of this book. I did not like the characters or the writing style, and the plot was just too outlandish. The story is told in 5 parts, each narrated by a different character. I liked some parts more than others. Liv's was just flat-out weird.

The writing, I don't know.....there was just something that irked me about it. It was jumpy, never flat out just saying anything. It was hard for me to picture anything and the author assumed I could fill in the empty spaces. There was a lot of reading in-between the lines.

And as I said, the characters were unlikable. They were completely impulsive and I never knew what was up with them. They were just crazy sometimes. I never felt any sympathy for any of them.

It takes a while for the plot to figure out where it wants to be, but by then, I was already dissatisfied with the book. The plot was pretty much all over the place, and pretty much completely unrealistic. It thrived off of coincidences. And also, I don't think the end wrapped up nicely enough.

There wasn't much to enjoy with this book. There were some good moments, but I don't think puddling through all the muck was worth it to get to them.

Jennifer says

I received an advance copy of this book free from Goodreads First Reads. Expected to be released in May 2010, this is the first of several novels by Emily Winslow that may feature similar characters. I thought this book would be very appealing because of Ms. Winslow's experience creating logic puzzles. If you enjoy watching a story unfold from multiple perspectives, you will enjoy this novel. Unfortunately, the book reads like someone started with a puzzle outline and then tried to fit in the narrative. Several plot twists seem unlikely and take away from the story. I still can't figure out how a character with a severely injured leg that eventually lands the character in the hospital decides to learn to drive a stick shift. I enjoyed Ms. Winslow's description of Cambridge as well as the section that inspired the title. I'm hopeful that future novels will more fully flesh out the characters and rely less on unlikely plot twists.

Sharon says

I received an advance copy of this book from Goodreads First Read.

This book's description caught my attention, and I thought it sounded like it might be a page turner what with two Cambridge students (Polly and Liv) interested in the same young man who disappears.

It turns out that the book is uneven. It starts slow, gets better about half way through, and then ends with a whimper. It is hard to sort out the unlikeable characters. The twists and turns of the plot and the characters' stories are at first engrossing but then just seem more unbelievable as the novel continues. There's Polly's father killing her former boyfriend, Nick falling, injuring himself and being trapped in a friend's old manor house, and Harry's obsession with breeding canaries in his home to name a few.

I did enjoy that the plot was told from the different characters' perspectives, but then those perspectives revealed the improbable events in each of their lives, and I couldn't wait for it to end.

Susan says

I'm not sure what to say about this weird British murder mystery/thriller. It's filled with unlikable characters and unlikely "twists." The novel starts off really slow; when it picks up, though, things just get even more

melodramatic and far-fetched. Like I said, it's just ... weird. I did finish the book (which is saying something), but I'd only give it about a C- (and that's being generous).

karen says

brrring brrring...

hello? i am phoning in a book review. this cool?

i am just not feeling inspired by this book. it was fine, but it really seemed to be trying too hard on one hand, and then getting careless and plot-holey on the other.

there is just...too much. there are all these storylines that are provocative but are quickly dropped, or seem to only exist because they are supposed to be intriguing, but when they are all together in one book and not really explored, it is just the literary equivalent of empty calories. do red herrings have empty calories?

here - these are all suitable alternate titles for the subplots of these dysfunctional characters or *harlequin presents* titles: who's your mommy? lesbian aunt likes pears. millionaires for a month. loving my brother's lover. older-woman barnyard seduction. (view spoiler) etc. etc. every character has some sort of Big Dramatic Thing in their past that might have an effect on their overall personality, sure, but seems to be used here just to give them something unusual in their construction, but not necessarily functional. like wings on an ostrich.

ain't going nowhere.

it would have been perfectly fine without all that clutter. or to have less *dramatic* clutter. there are more realistic reasons for liv to be the way she is. and i still don't understand how polly's past affected her in that particular way. gretchen - also bizarre. these characters just don't work for me. and with a tighter storyline, i could have overlooked it and just settled in for a fun and unrealistic mystery novel. but... yeah, no dice.

and one last time for those of you not paying attention - one book, five narrators. we have been here before. just because some of them are british and some of them are american, and some of them are boys and some of them are girls; just because their bodies and backgrounds are different does not mean that their voices are automatically distinguishable unless you write 'em that way. yes, the british ones say things like "bloody idiot," bravo. not good enough.

this book wasn't bad enough for me to waste any energy trashing it, but it wasn't great. and as a *secret history* readalike - well - it was not one.

i have to eat food. i think that is more important right now than thinking about this book any further.

brian - there are a ton of birds in this book. a ton.

Jill says

I received an advance copy from Goodreads First Reads; I enjoy debut novels and this one seemed to have a lot of promise. The author herself lives in Cambridge, England, where the novel is set and indeed, the opening of the novel, which hints at the disappearance of one of the key characters, Nick, is compelling. However, the promised psychological insights and haunting mystery did not pay off -- for me. There were too many incongruities, coincidences, and unfleshed-out characters with overblown emotions. Some of the plot contrivances seemed unrealistic. I believe this debut writer has talent, but has not yet met her stride.

Bookread2day says

Every minute is astonishing. Nick takes Polly to his office, they start kissing. Polly pushes Nick off. Polly is sick then bolts from the office. Nick, Polly, Liv help blind professor Gretchen organising photographs of her mother. Gretchen's mother was a novelist.

Nick disappears. Policeman Morris questions Polly but the last time she saw Nick was in his office two days ago.

The Whole World has lots of twist and turns. Full on family secrets, suspense and surprises. A masterful who done it. Emily Winslow is a new name to watch out for.

Darcia Helle says

While I enjoyed Emily Winslow's writing style, I was not all that enamored with her first novel. In A Whole World, we get to know a group of characters, each from their own perspective. They interact through a series of events that eventually leads to murder. The characters themselves seemed overblown and exaggerated. The plot didn't actually move anywhere until about 2/3 through the book.

I found some things too overdone and other things just plain unbelievable. For instance, I didn't see how a man whose ankle was so badly injured that he couldn't ride his bike could then suddenly drive a standard and push in the clutch of a car. Yet, once he got back home, he was hospitalized due to the severe ankle injury. Things like this had me shaking my head and took me right out of the story. On top of that, the exaggerated emotions and behaviors of every single character made me question whether anyone in A Whole World had a shred of sanity.

** I received this book as an early review copy from Goodreads. **

Christy Stewart says

I wasn't expecting much from this book and began reading it with a 'Let's get this over with' state of mind but before I got to the bottom of the first page Winslow had won me over.

The story was good but that comes secondary to the authors style. I was looking forward just to see how she would phrase the next sentence. I would be willing to try and re-read some of my least favorite books if

Winslow was re-writing them.

Katie says

This book technically precedes The Start of Everything, which I read last week. It follows a similar style, telling the story through different voices. It also tells the story in less than chronological order, which can be confusing (for example, a character who you know is dead is suddenly narrating). I think this style works all right for her, but it's not one that I am particularly fond of.

The book itself is fine. It doesn't seem to matter much that I read the two out of order (the only thing this book does is introduce a few characters and explain how one of the characters in book books was injured). The mystery is more compelling than the follow-up, with a decent twist. However, much like in The Start of Everything, none of the characters are particularly likable (I guess that is her thing?), so it was hard to really root for anyone. Not to mention, they all seem to be fundamentally damaged in some way (apparently everyone who goes to Cambridge is in desperate need of therapy?). I get this as a writing device, but it is a little tedious for the reader.

However, I would recommend the book. The writing is decent, the story is engaging, though a bit slow to start, and I was generally satisfied with the ending.

Marty says

This is an excellent first novel by Emily Winslow. I found it very well written and very hard to put down. This story starts with a love triangle that moves into a mystery, murder and mental illness. The characters are well written and defined. I think the story could move into a sequel.

There is some discussion of the whole world as it relates to the characters in the story, and how we view our own small world as relates to the larger picture.

I hope Ms. Winslow has more stories.

Blair says

A classic case of a story that sounded great and, on the face of it, seemed like something I would love, but was executed so badly that it sucked all the potential goodness out of an appealing premise. When I first read the plot summary, I thought it would be more or less impossible for me to dislike this book. Unfortunately, it did a very good job of proving me completely wrong.

The book starts off following Polly and Liv, two 20-year-old American girls studying at Cambridge university. They form a close, and weirdly exclusive, friendship with Nick, a postgraduate student, and inevitably a love triangle develops; Liv likes Nick, Nick likes Polly. Polly, meanwhile, has issues and secrets of her own which she struggles to keep hidden when her mother pays an unwanted visit to Cambridge. Intertwined with the students' lives is the story of Gretchen, a blind professor for whom they are all working. Gretchen is trying to put together a book about her mother, a long-forgotten author, but as the others help her to identify family photographs, they start to suspect that her childhood memories are out of sync with reality. Soon after the start of the story, Nick disappears - apparently without a trace - and this event provides a focus

for the plot. The book's narrative is split between five voices: in chronological order, they are Polly, Nick, Morris (the police officer investigating Nick's disappearance), Gretchen and Liv.

Main problem: awkward language, and lots of it. Polly's narrative is excessively Americanised; I already know she's American, I don't need to be repeatedly hit over the head with it at every opportunity. (She and Liv say 'okay?' at the end of practically every sentence.) While the other narrators are at least clearly differentiated, the English characters have a noticeable tendency to use incongruous American phrases here and there. While I can just about accept the over-abundant use of 'crazy', no person born and brought up in England would ever say 'wrote her' instead of 'wrote to her', and it's unlikely they'd constantly use 'mail' rather than 'post' either. Why set a book in a quintessentially English city and then fill it with American language and American characters? Polly also sounds, frankly, stupid considering that she's supposed to be a student of science at CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY. There's a bit where she actually says (I am paraphrasing, but this is the sentiment) 'I hope every day that it's true' about... evolution. Seriously. There are some really strange verbs in here, as well; at one point a character's eyes 'squirt' tears, and a couple of chapters later someone else's eyes 'sprout' tears. Horrible mental images, to be honest.

Secondary problem: none of the characters are likeable, and their behaviour is bizarre. I think this is partly to do with the way things are described, which often seems to miss out crucial details and feels oddly disjointed. Characters jump in and out of scenes with neither explanation nor exposition. I really struggled with the fact that *everyone* (not just Polly herself in her self-torturing moments after his disappearance) acts like it's wrong of Polly to 'refuse' sex with Nick. She isn't even in a relationship with him, they've kissed a couple of times and he drags her upstairs into a small office. Even if Polly didn't have issues surrounding sex and guilty feelings about upsetting Liv, why WOULD she have wanted to sleep with him for the first time in this situation?! Nick's decisions are equally stupid, as is his weird relationship with Lesley, who he happily sleeps with days after leaving Cambridge, despite being SO cut up over 'betraying' Polly (who isn't even his girlfriend) that he has to get out of the city instantly, leaving his family and friends thinking he might be dead... it just doesn't add up. And Polly's mother seems certifiably insane in every scene.

Often, when I read an excellent book, I find it spurs me on and inspires me to write in the hope that I might one day be able to produce something half as good. This had the opposite effect - it made me *scared* to write for fear that I might come up with a reasonably good idea and execute it as poorly as this. The only redeeming features were a) the fact that the premise and setting were vaguely interesting and b) the fascinating (but underused) character of Gretchen's mother. (Possibly also c) the shout-out to *Springwatch* and *Autumnwatch*.) Altogether, though, I was really glad when I finally finished the book. Not recommended at all - don't be fooled by the plot summary, it's nowhere near as good as it sounds like it could be.

Mandy says

Actually more like 2.5 stars. This was okay, but in the end I was a bit baffled by it all.

The first half of the book I enjoyed. I wanted to know where we were going with all these plotlines. By the end of it I was just disinterested and fed up with it all.

I think the author just tried a little too hard. I felt the characters, while being all obnoxious, were little more than caricatures in the end. I mean it got to be completely unbelievable that these people would act like that, would say those things, were just "real". Once I lost any belief in the characters the book just didn't work for me.

I do understand that this is her debut novel. But I think someone should have told her that less is more sometimes.

I liked the writing style though, a lot.

I do have her two other books. I'm probably going to read them. Maybe, sometime, just not going to be yet.

Shan says

Is it odd that my favorite character was the grouchy workaholic police detective?* I thought the story had a lot of promise, and it was certainly a quick read, but I didn't feel like there was really anyone to root for.

*Perhaps not that odd, since he appears in Winslow's new novel too. Definitely going to give that one a whirl.
