



If You Were Here

Alafair Burke

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Magazine journalist McKenna Wright is chasing the latest urban folktale-the story of an unidentified woman who heroically pulled a teenaged boy from the subway tracks, seconds before an oncoming train. When McKenna locates a short video snippet that purportedly captures part of the incident, she thinks she has an edge on the competition scrambling to identify the mystery heroine.

She is shocked to discover that the woman in the video bears a strong resemblance to Susan Hauptmann, a close friend who disappeared without a trace a decade earlier. Investigating her disappearance, the NYPD concluded that the nomadic Susan-forced by her father into an early military life, floundering as an adult for a fixed identity-simply left town to start over again somewhere else.

But McKenna has always believed the truth went deeper than the police investigation ever reached, and sees Susan's resurfacing as a sign that she wants to be found. Yet when she shares the image with her husband, Patrick, who was Susan's classmate at West Point, he isn't convinced.

What would have been a short-lived metro story sends McKenna on a dangerous search for the missing woman, a twisting journey through New York City that will force her to unearth long-buried truths much closer to home-to her own husband, who seems to know much more about Susan than McKenna could have ever imagined...

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From Reader Review If You Were Here for online ebook

Yasmin says

Good summer, beach read. Very plot driven book...character development seriously lacking. Characters felt stilt, flat; wasn't interested in getting to know any of them better. Too many twists/turns in the end. Lots of repetitive jargon, think this book would have been better if it was maybe 50 pages shorter. If You Were Here is probably my least favorite Burke read, however, it was still a decent enough read to hold my interest and keep me reading until the last page.

Elvan says

I picked up this audiobook hoping to read more work by this author after enjoying a book she co-wrote with Mary Higgins Clark.

First off, the voice reader for this audiobook could not differentiate her male voices from her female characters. It was almost painful to listen to. A good voice actor can make a good book great. That is not the case with If You Were Here.

Back to the case, the story starts out with all kinds of potential. A mysterious woman saves the thief of her own cell phone from certain death on a subway track. McKenna recognizes mystery woman as old friend who disappeared years before. The plot takes many twists and turns from here but too much repetition of the limited facts made this thriller less than thrilling. A bit of deus ex machina near the end and a fairly obvious telegraphed ending and this became a very ho hum thriller.

Michelle says

Not my favorite Alafair Burke book, but still quite enjoyable. A few unique twists and “a-ha!” moments.

Jane says

disappointing. convoluted--too many plotlines. mc is bit of a dim bulb--still jumps to illogical conclusions. and was left with a couple of questions--do secret ecoterrorists really wear logo buttons? and why did susan disappear? couldn't understand the underlying premise of the entire book.

Alysia says

This book was mailed to me from the publishing company after I didn't get a copy from BEA13. I waited in

line for a while only to find out I just missed out. I left my information and honestly didn't think they would send me a copy the following week like they said. I think it actually showed up three weeks after BEA13 and I had completely forgotten about it.

If you had a friend who just vanished off the Earth, would you consider her dead after five years or just think she is in hiding? A mysterious woman chances a boy who just stole her cell phone though the crowds of a New York subway platform. The video of the chase goes viral when someone sees her lift the fallen kid off the tracks before the on coming train runs him over. Yes! She saves his life, gets her phone back and no one knows who this super woman is. Once the whole world has seen it one person thinks she knows the name of the mysterious super woman but that would mean she was not dead after all.

There are some books that love to create a web of several story lines only to bring you back full circle. Then there are the others that make a small situation into the end of the world complicated. This book is a bit of both. You will go from one story about the kid and cell phone then you will find yourself reading about the FBI, dead cops and terrorist. The story reminds me of an episode of Law and Order. One minute it's a dead person and the next you are on an undercover sting for the Russian underground sex slave business. This book tries to bring all the Law and Order elements into your journey. You have the report for a magazine who used to be a Lawyer. There is the detective helping her out along the way, the FBI and the bad guys. Everyone is here.

I think I was a bit overwhelmed with the number of webs this story created and how we get from point A to point B. There is just too much going on and I would have liked it to be a bit simpler. I know life is not simple but...the boyfriend too! How many people need to be involved? The overall story is good and I would recommend this to anyone who is interested in Law and Order. There is a bit of violence here and there but nothing too gross and bloody.

Krystin Rachel (Here's The Fucking Twist) says

If I could use any .gif as a metaphor for this book it would have to be this...

The author took something pretty that could have been dolled up perfectly in the right hands, and turned it into an overdone mess.

I really like Alafair Burke's *Ellie Hatcher* series. I find her to be an engaging author who can create an interesting female lead and a decent mystery with believable suspense, so I'm not sure what the hell happened here...but it wasn't good.

Covering the story of a man who is saved by the woman he tried to mug on a crowded subway (who then disappears into thin air like a superhero) McKenna Wright - a disgraced lawyer, turned journalist - stumbles across footage of the incident and believes the mystery woman is a friend who went missing years earlier. So McKenna sets out to find the truth. Is this her friend? And if it is, what happened to her? Why hasn't she ever let her family and friends know she's ok?

The whole premise of the book really lets the possibilities be limitless, giving an opportunity for all kinds of suspense and tension. But it seems Burke got so excited by how many different directions this story could go that she picked all her favourites and tried to stuff them into one novel, hoping it would make sense if she explained it enough. And *ohhhh* are there a lot of explanations.

Each story line has its own red herrings and twists, and each twist required pages of explanations of past events (seriously, you'd think you might have missed three previous books) that took *soooo long* to get through that any thrill the plot could have had was totally lost.

Call me picky if you want, but I think the whys and what ifs should be revealed in a plot by circumstance and incidents. The reader should *just get it, as it's happening*. The shocks should be instantaneous with the reveal, as it clicks in our heads. I really don't want to read a droning on of character monologues answering the question "why?" It reminds me of an evil villain explaining his whole evil plan when he has the hero tied up over a water tank of sharks with lasers on their heads. The hero always gets away while the villain is yapping, ruining anything cool that might have happened with the sharks.

Show me, don't tell me.

By the time I was 60% through, I was getting a little annoyed with the plot(s), the absurd amount of detail, the dumb/shallow main character of McKenna Wright, and all of the *why did you have to go and make things so complicated*-ness of it all (#AvrilLavigneShoutout). I mean even the main character had two names she was referred to throughout the whole novel - Wright and Jordan. If anything should be straightforward, shouldn't it be a name? It was just another eye-twitching useless detail that didn't need to be.

But just when I was considering ending the whole debacle, Burke would pull me in with a tiny bit of new information about the overall plot and I just couldn't give up on finding out if this mess would ever make sense. Because, to be honest, the main premise of finding McKenna's missing friend was actually a decent idea. It's in the execution and the editing that this book really has a problem. But by 75% I couldn't believe there was a whole quarter of a book left and I went from annoyed and curious to straight up hate-reading this bitch until the bitter end; wading through a sea of even more explanations, loose ends that never connect, and unnecessary detail that overwhelmed any suspense and thrills, and made this a real labour to get through instead of entertaining.

The ending was lame too. Thumbs down.

I don't know who I would recommend this too? Maybe people who are addicted to complicated, frustrating relationships that you keep going back to, like self-punishment?

Mostly I would say if you're interested in reading Alafair Burke for the first time, you would be better off getting into the Ellie Hatcher series where it's obvious she's a talented author. With this offering? Not so much.

Julie says

This has been on my TBR for 2 years...pretty good read. Don't know why I waited so long!

CC says

I liked the writing okay, but the book not so much. This author, Alafair Burke, is the female answer to John Grisham, as she usually pens legal thrillers.

A former District Attorney -- McKenna Jordan -- who left her job after exposing a cop as a liar, now works for a NY magazine as a journalist. In researching a story about a young kid who was pulled off a subway track by a mystery woman, she realizes the woman is her old friend Susan, who she thought died ten years ago. Thus, the plot is born: tracking down Susan and the mysteries that caused her disappearance -- which merge with McKenna's own former job loss.

The plot took a long time to really start, and once it did, I found I didn't care about Susan, who is supposed to be this super compelling figure, the center of this big mystery. She was just annoying. She was portrayed as a slutty, aggressive woman, a WestPoint grad whose sole purpose in life was to please her overbearing general father.

Then Susan gets caught up in tons of illegal shit...

I just didn't buy the two of them as friends to begin with. They were so completely different. The book kept telling me that Susan was a central figure in McKenna's life. But, really, she was just some girl she knew. Who cares? All the fond "Susan memories" the author kept chucking out every few pages made Susan seem like a crazy, erratic bitch, and the main character McKenna as too dense to see it.

Lots of the characters didn't seem to be developed as they needed to be to care about them. The bombshells of plot went off (and off and off) and lives changed forever -- but it had little effect.

Lloyd Russell says

If You Were Here is Alafair Burke's 9th novel – but only my 1st. In fact, I had never heard of her before getting this ARC from HarperCollins. I have to say that I liked it quite a bit. It's very humbling to learn that there are a ton of authors that I don't know who have all written a bunch of books. I would have to read 700 books a year instead of 70 to begin to know who's out there.

But enough about my literary inadequacy. If You Were Here has a very intricate plot. I'll give you a brief synopsis. 10 years ago, McKenna Wright is a promising ADA (assistant district attorney), until she wrongly accuses a policeman, Officer Macklin, of murdering a street thug. Her actions create enormous racial tension in NYC and ruin Macklin's career. This blow-up leads McKenna to leave the DA's office, and she ultimately ends up as a journalist for NYC Magazine. Following so far?

10 years later, McKenna comes across video footage of an old friend, Susan Hauptmann, who saves a teenage boy from being crushed in the New York subway. Susan has been missing for most of those 10 years. In her pursuit of Susan, McKenna prints a story about a judge for the magazine that is discredited and, once again, lands her in hot water. She is fired from the magazine and sets out, on her own, to find out who is working so hard to make her look bad.

I'm actually doing a pretty lousy job of summing this book up. There is so much that happens that I simply can't do justice to the synopsis – even though I earlier bragged that I would do just that. Besides McKenna, Susan, and Officer Macklin, there is a cast of tens, and they all have big parts. A few of them are:

Patrick Jordan, McKenna's husband

Joe Scanlin, the detective who handled the shooting 10 years earlier

General and Gretchen Hauptmann, Susan's sister and father

Will Getty, the district attorney who McKenna worked for at the time of the big fiasco

Carl Buckner, a very bright and conscientious hit man

Adam Bayne, a classmate of Patrick's and Susan's at West Point, who goes into business with General Hauptmann

Jamie Mercado, FBI agent

Bob Vance, McKenna's boss at NYC Magazine

And a bunch more

With as many important and well-developed characters as are in the book, you might think that the story would be hard to follow. But it's not. Each character is well-defined and fits in perfectly with the story and each other. I liked it a lot and give it a 3 out of 4. And, by the way, this is my 11th 3 out of 34 books in 2013, plus 5-3.5's, 1-4.0, and 1-4.5. That is a percentage of 52.9% that are 3 or higher. That's pretty darn good. I knew you would want to know.

John says

A mystery thriller that constantly entertains yet somehow never quite detonates.

Ten years ago McKenna Jordan was a bright young up-and-coming Assistant DA. Then two things happened in quick succession: she got involved in a controversial case where a white cop had killed a black man, and her best friend, Susan Hauptmann, disappeared. McKenna, now a journalist, has never really thought about the fact that there might be a connection between the two incidents.

But now an amateur phone video of a woman saving someone's life in the New York subway convinces McKenna that Susan is alive after all these years. As she tries to work out where Susan might be and what actually happened, she becomes aware that powerful, unseen forces are putting into gear a mighty cover-up, and they don't care if people have to be killed to keep the secret.

People like McKenna . . .

That's the setup in brief. But then there are the complications. Oh, lordy, are there complications. It's to Burke's credit that it's not hard to keep track of them all, but, that said, after a while I was beginning to wish we could get along with rather fewer dramatic revelations. I was reminded of why I tend not to watch those old fifteen- or twenty-part cinema serials: I get weary of all the cliffhangers. There was the same sort of effect here: by the time the real whapalooza of a revelation came along at the end, the humdinger that was supposed to blow my socks off, it seemed like just another link in a long chain.

On the plus side, Burke has a very lucid, accessible style -- I can see exactly why someone thought to pair her up with Mary Higgins Clark, who has that same easy readability. As a result, I was never at any point bored or even close to it; but, writing these notes a mere few days after finishing the book (I'm on an impossible deadline), I already find it a bit hard to bring the novel into focus. There's nothing wrong with entertainment of this sort, and sometimes I'm actually more in the mood for it than anything more stretching (*Midsomer Murders* does have its place in the scheme of things, after all), but this time I wasn't.

Magpie67 says

Alafair Burke has this incredible knack for spinning topics within topics. Oh, she weaves a mighty web of deceit that rolls straight up into a giant snowball... thus everyone in the path is touched with a bit of tragedy. Sometimes the paths we choose are not always wise and our decisions on the path lead into much more trouble. Maybe... just maybe, had one person really left and chose a path to prosper... other dominoes wouldn't have fallen and yet karma did strike back on those with greedy, sticky fingers. I loved the blend of lawyer/reporter sleuthing techniques to uncover the stories that needed to be told. Brilliant prose with a dash of personal relationships... how important secrets kept hidden can damage even the best, sturdy friendships and or marriages.

Michael says

While pursuing a lead about a young man pulled from the subway tracks by a mysterious woman, lawyer turned journalist McKenna Wright uncovers more than she bargained for. A video shot on a cell phone reveals the identity of the woman -- someone who looks a lot like McKenna's old friend Susan, who went missing five years before under mysterious circumstances. Not content to let sleeping dogs lie, McKenna begins to slowly peel back the layers of the current story and discover just how much of a connection is has to the disappearance of her friend all those years ago.

For the past couple of years, Alafair Burke has given readers some of the more entertaining, character driven legal thrillers that don't have the name John Grisham attached to them. But with her newest novel *If You Were Here*, Burke tries something different from the legal thriller (though there are links to McKenna's legal past and her time in the district attorney's office) and goes in for a full-blown suspense thriller. Using short chapters, Burke keeps the surprises coming at a good clip that you'll keep turning the pages and wondering just what the next dramatic revelation could or should be. It makes the novel a page turner, but not one that necessarily holds up well to scrutiny if you start to think too much either while taking a break from reading or once the entire picture is revealed.

It's interesting that this novel is headed for shelves in time for the summer season because as I read it, I kept thinking just how well it would work as a beach or poolside read.

And while Burke's previous works have taken a page from the legal thriller column and the works of Grisham, this one seems a bit more to take a page from the thrillers of Lee Child and his Jack Reacher series. (Eagle eyed readers will spot several homages to Reacher, though thankfully no one in this book is obsessed with coffee and that the fold-up toothbrush is the single greatest invention in the history of humankind).

This isn't necessarily my favorite offering from Burke, but it's a nice stand-alone novel that may open the door to readers discovering her other novels and enjoying those.

Inn Auni says

I have a confession to make. I only read Part I and Part V and skimmed the rest. In short, I got my closure on

the mystery but, developed no feeling for the characters, well except for Patrick, Paul and Potter. Hmm AB must like the letter P so much.

McKenna Jordan (I thought McKenna was her last name) saw her missing friend of 10 years saved a teenager's life. And it became her mission to find the truth. It was kind of weird. I did not get any best friend vibe from McKenna and Susan.

"What you're doing right now isn't about Susan," he said to her at last. "I'm worried about her, too. So is her father. So is everyone who knows her. But you're making this about you. Things suck for you at work, and you're using this as an outlet."

Debi G. says

Help Wanted: Editor willing to cut repetitive and non-essential information and assure the writer that readers will remember a main character went to West Point without being told so every few pages.

I feel badly about being so snarky, but I'm going to let this stand. The synopsis intrigued me, but the actual narrative is disappointingly amateurish.

Barbara Mitchell says

McKenna Wright is a heroine I can believe in. No super powers or jumping into a situation wiser women would get away from. She's smart, yes, but also blessed with common sense. She's married to a West Point grad and they were both friends with one of his classmates, Susan Hauptmann. They were aware that Susan had problems with her stern military father. Then Susan seemingly disappeared off the face of the earth. She left behind everything in her life in New York City, and no clue where she had gone. No body was ever found.

It has been ten years now and McKenna, a former assistant D.A. and now a journalist, is fact finding for a story about a young man who fell onto the subway tracks but was saved by a woman who ran off without identifying herself. When McKenna sees a tape of it, she is shocked to recognize the woman who saved him as her long-lost friend.

McKenna is no longer a lawyer and that in itself is a strange story. Now she is trying to find Susan and gets into the middle of another strange tale.

The characters McKenna meets along the way are believable as well. Through each one she learns a little bit more but doesn't know who to trust, even her husband is acting suspicious. Was he involved with Susan? Does he know she is actually alive? A detective McKenna had offended years ago becomes an ally in the hunt.

I didn't figure out the whole story until it was spelled out to me in the final chapters, but then it made perfect sense. I requested the book because I had read Alafair Burke before, and I certainly wasn't disappointed this time either.

Highly recommended

Source: Amazon Vine
