



Lost Without You

Rachael Johns

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Four women, one dress, and the secret that binds them all...

On a special night that is supposed to be a celebration of new beginnings, Paige MacRitchie's joy quickly falls away when her mother collapses during the speeches at her book launch. In the aftermath, and terrified of losing her, Paige decides she wants to make the ultimate tribute to her parents' perfect marriage: she will wear her mother's wedding dress for her own big day.

There's just one problem – her mum, Rebecca, no longer has the dress.

As Paige tries to track down the elusive gown, she discovers that Rebecca has a long-hidden secret that, if revealed, could blow her whole family apart. Her new friend Josie is at a crossroads too. She met her husband Nick when she was singing in an eighties-themed bar, but now she's lonely, yearning for a family and wondering if Nick understands her at all.

And then there's nurse Clara. When she married Rob Jones, an up-and-coming rock star, she thought she was in it forever. But now Clara needs to make a new life for herself and Rob can't seem to understand that it's over.

When the fates of these four women intertwine in an unexpected and powerful way, none of their lives will ever be the same again.

A fresh and poignant novel of family, journeys, past decisions ... and dresses ... from the ABIA award-winning, bestselling author Rachael Johns.

Lost Without You Details

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Lost Without You by Rachael Johns. (2018).

Four women, one dress, and the secret that binds them all...

Paige is newly engaged after a shock health turn for her mother Rebecca. She decides to wear Rebecca's wedding dress but her mum doesn't have it anymore so she'll have to track it down - but along the way she discovers Rebecca has a hidden secret. In that journey she meets Josie, who is at a crossroads in her marriage. Then there's Clara, who separated from her husband Rob and is trying to make a new life but Rob can't seem to move on. All four women are connected now and life won't be the same.

I am fully aware that that Rachael Johns is a popular author but this is the first book of hers I've picked up - and I thought it was fabulous. My only (very small) negative is that the circumstances these women come together in is one hell of a coincidence but I'm willing to put my disbelief aside haha. The book covers some pretty challenging and emotional themes/life events including a serious health issue, adoption, depression, infertility (including miscarriages and stillbirths), missing persons, suicide and lifelong grief. So prepare yourselves for some emotional triggers! Intertwined with these is the lighter storyline re the wedding dress hunt which is cute. The four women are all great realistic characters - in general lovely women who have some flaws like we all do. I enjoyed that the chapters alternated between the viewpoints of all four ladies. I'd be happy to recommend this excellent novel.

Scarlet Wilson says

Loved this intricately woven story of people all connected through a wedding dress. Each character felt entirely different and I loved how the sensitive subjects in the story were dealt with. This is a touching, heartwarming and a tiny bit sad story of how lives intertwine and touch each other. Couldn't stop turning the pages.

Helen says

WOW MS Johns what a story you blew me away, you just have the best voice I felt so close to the four woman in this story, they were like friends I shared their heartache and their joy, there were tears and smiles, I recommend clearing the day when you pick this one up and you should because you won't want to put it down once you start it.

This story brings together four woman and a wedding dress, Paige is filled with joy at the launch of her book, her loving boyfriend Solomon is there as are her very loved Mum and Dad, but when her mother Rebecca collapses and is diagnosed with a serious illness, Rebecca thinks more about the secret she has kept for thirty five years, should she open up or not? Paige and Solomon get engaged and Paige sets out on a

mission to find her mother's wedding dress so as she can wear it.

The search for the dress brings Paige in contact with Josie a beautiful thirty five year old who has been through a lot with her fabulous husband Nik and is having a few problems but her and Paige hit it off instantly, meanwhile Josie meets a man at a bar who she opens up to about her problems and he gives her a card to seek help from his ex-wife Clara, and again the friendship between these two is instant.

Clara is a nurse a very caring person who goes out of her way to help anyone she can she has been through a lot in her life and now she is divorced from Robert Jones a singer from the eighties it is time to move on, but meeting Josie is about to really change her life.

Rebecca, Paige, Clara and Josie are all connected in some way and I don't want to say too much other than pick this one up and read it, it really is a beautiful story, lots of emotions happy and sad, it is moving and there were tears and smiles, thank you MS Johns you know how to make a reader happy with your words another for the keeper shelf.

Stacey Houllis says

This was a very beautiful writing about a wedding dress that traveled but there is a secret that comes to light through the search of the dress. Paige MacRitchie mother Rebecca is diagnosed with kidney failure so she decides to search for her mother's wedding not realizing that her mother is carrying a secret for over 30 years for when she was fifteen years old before she met her father Hugh. Rebecca has now been diagnosed with kidney failure thinks that maybe its time to reveal her secret of given birth to her childhood sweetheart Robbie a singer in a time rock band of the eighties One track mind and forced by her parents to give the baby up for adoption.

Clara a nurse she was married to Robbie and divorced from. She ends up caring for Rebecca in the hospital and also volunteers at the center that helps women deal with grief after miscarriages.

Josie a teacher who moved from Perth with her husband who has suffered many miscarriages and wonders if her marriage is okay.

As Paige search for the dress leads her to Josie who now has the dress, it when she takes her mother to see the dress that she see a baby photo of her baby she gave up. When she asks Josie who the baby is she replies it is her. Rebecca now knows she had a girl baby, not a boy as her parents told her.

Through the book, we see the emotions that the characters go through as they each discover the truth of Rebecca's secrets affects them all. Including Clara, Robbie's depression losing his child over the years has hurt him, Paige dealing with the discovery of a sister, Rebecca' guilt of giving her baby up and the effect her parent's decisions for her has on her and her family now, Josie finding her biological family but also never forgetting her adoptive family. And what becomes of the dress as well in the end is also fitting to the story. Another one Rachael Johns great written novels.

Val says

Great book, a wonderful intertwined story. Even though i worked the story out before the end it still was a great read. I was there in the people's lives.

Leanne Lovegrove says

Rachael Johns is the Queen of characters. She nails the characters in her novels brilliantly: they are real, they are flawed, they are likeable and by the end of the story they become our friends. This is a warm, compelling and great read.

Brenda says

With the devastating diagnosis of Paige MacRitchie's mother, Rebecca's diagnosis of kidney failure, life changed for them all. But it also gave Rebecca a severe jolt – the secret she'd hidden since she was fifteen years old was eating at her. It had never let her go, but she hadn't even told her beloved husband Hugh, and certainly not her daughter. So, should she tell them now? Or should it remain a secret forever?

Paige with her boyfriend Sol – who was days away from being her fiancé – had discussed their wedding. And Paige was overcome with the need to find her mother's wedding dress and get married in it herself. Tracking down the dress would be a monumental effort with results that would blow Paige away...

Josie and Nik were relatively new friends of Paige and Sol, but the four of them had clicked and become close friends. Clara was Rebecca's nurse who also volunteered in a care role. Her recent divorce had left her alone, but her extended family of sisters and brothers-in-law kept her sane. What would bring these four very different women together?

Lost Without You by Aussie author Rachael Johns is a poignant story of secrets, relationships, friendships and love. Of the hurt that one person can cause another, especially a loved one, by the secrets they keep. And of forgiveness and reconciliation. *Lost Without You* is a gentle story centred around a beautiful dress which I enjoyed very much. Highly recommended.

With thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for my digital ARC to read in exchange for an honest review.

marlin1 says

Reading a Rachael John's novel is like curling up with a good friend.....and sometimes there is something that you don't agree with but all is well in the end.

In 'Lost Without You' there is definitely a case of six degrees of separation.

The main characters of Rebecca, Paige, Josie and Clara are all seemingly unrelated/unconnected until the tale is told.

With themes of loss, miscarriage, adoption, alcoholism, loneliness to friendship and feeling needed, there seems a lot going on but it is all explored very well.

A very enjoyable story which I think would lend it self well to a book club discussion.

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for a copy to read.

Kathryn says

Review to follow

Kerrie Crabb says

Loved this book! I really identified with the characters and the story moved along at a good pace, never leaving you bored. An emotional tale of what a woman goes through when giving up a baby.

Deborah says

There's something really warm and familiar about Rachael Johns' writing and characters. I've not read any of her rural romance novels, but I've enjoyed her recent contemporary novels and each time I turn the first page I settle into a comfortable reverie of sorts. I could be reading about people I know. Friends, family. They're authentic and - even if not always completely likeable - they're relatable.

I've met Rachael Johns a few times in person and she's exactly as you'd imagine from her writing. Warm and friendly. I enjoy her plots and can appreciate underlying themes of her novels - often about love, relationships, secrets, trust and so forth, but all of that emanates from the characters she grows and I think it's the interplay between them that make her books so enjoyable.

I loved the women we meet in this book. Rebecca and Clara are of a similar age to me (slightly older... ahem, of course!). And though I've not been married or had kids - I could relate to much of their lives, including Clara's devastation over her lack of children - as well as Josie's of course. Initially both Clara and Josie feel kinda displaced, as if they don't fit in with those around them. In Clara's case she SHOULD have a partner and grown children by now, and in Josie's: children (and playing happy families).

I appreciated that, when we first meet her, Josie's grappling with her demons and I actually thought the story was going to go in a different direction for a while, but think Johns gives both Josie and Paige AMAZING partners - and I'm insanely jealous of both of them for that reason. (As an aside, I also liked the sound of Gregg, Clara's love interest!)

All four women (and the men we meet incidentally) are complex and felt very real. As I said, I could appreciate Josie's issues when we first meet her, I LOVED the sound of Paige's passion and her picture book. Clara came across like a truly decent person and I was keen for her to get on with her life, and Rebecca just seemed lovely - albeit with her long-kept secret.

I did get somewhat frustrated with the attitude of the other three women towards Rebecca when her secret is uncovered. I think Clara's reaction in particular annoyed the crap out of me, though in fairness her character does confess to a certain amount of jealousy or envy... so it's not as if she's hiding anything from us. But a bit more sympathy wouldn't have gone astray. And I particularly liked the inclusion of Paige's partner (Solomon) and his role in playing 'foil' to her black / white thinking at that point.

Johns again touches on (and skirts around) fraught and sensitive issues - about families and relationships and love and loss. Very specifically also again (as in her last book) about miscarriage, fertility and a woman's ability (or not) to carry a child / give birth... the ease with which some take it all for granted and extent to which it burdens another's life. And of course there's a reminder that loving and parenting a child doesn't necessarily mean they're biologically your own.

I was also interested in the reflections on romantic love here. I've mentioned the love interests of Paige, Josie (and even Clara) but Rebecca eventually surprised me as there's initially a sense that she's 'settled' for less than she wanted.

This would make a great bookclub book. There's an obvious discussion around the coincidence of all of these women meeting in the first place and I think it's important to get past that and realise there'd be no book otherwise. I can imagine discussions around Rebecca's motivations for digging into her past - because I was initially cynical about her justification; Clara's involvement with Josie and her own ex-husband (despite previously being adamant about getting him out of her life); Rebecca's husband's and daughter's reactions to her secret; and Josie's response.

There's also a strong sense of (perceptions of) blame and blamelessness and I think it'd be interesting to have that discussion.

All in all, a lot to think about and a wonderful read.

Claire says

What a fabulous read, it took me a bit to really get into the story, but then I was hooked. The characters were great, there was one of the women I liked less than the other three but by the end I felt I warmed to her. This has so many important issues threaded through the story, marriage, secrets, adoption, depression, alcoholism, suicide, organ donation and I'm sure I've missed a few others. It's a story of a wedding dress, but more importantly a secret that effects a vast amount of people in many different ways. It's a story of six degrees of separation and how one decision can have a flow on effect. I think Josie was my favourite character for most of the book, though Solomon and Nik were both great characters too. Whereas we usually hear about how adoption affects the woman giving up her child, this story lets us look at how men are affected by losing the child to adoption. This story had many twists and emotions that we get to experience and many characters we get to meet and care about. I definitely recommend that you make time to read this great novel, don't expect to get much else done once you pick it up, I know I didn't.

Thanks to NetGalley and Harlequin Australia for a copy in return for an honest review.

ND Campbell says

I won an advanced copy of Rachael John's *Lost Without You* after having enjoyed a number of her romance novels and I thought I had the measure of her as a writer. I now realise I needed to take a deeper breath before I dived into this book.

On the surface *Lost Without You* is the compelling story of four women whose lives are brought together by

circumstance and coincidence. Sounds straightforward, right? But you'd best check that idea before you turn the first page.

This is a big story, a novel that dives deep into our lives to explore the taboo topics that are usually only discussed in hushed whispers with our closest friends.

But it's a story that should be shared, one that needs to be told. I don't want to give too much away and steal the precious experience of walking this path yourself. I'm just going to say that this is a story that will touch you deeply. These four women will burrow into your heart until their tears fall down your cheeks and their joys inspire your smiles.

This book will fill you up in ways that many books can't. It's a spectacularly powerful story filled with hope, pain and inspiration and you will turn the last page richer for the experience of reading it.

Bree T says

I tore through this almost 500p book in a few hours in an afternoon. It's a complex story but also an easily read one, with relatable characters and although some of the situations rely on coincidence and close proximity, it's easy to set this aside and just enjoy the story that is being told here.

Paige is a devoted daughter to Rebecca and Hugh and when Rebecca falls ill at Paige's book launch and is diagnosed with quite a severe illness, Paige has the bright idea to wear her mother's wedding dress to her own up and coming wedding. Honestly Rebecca must have the only 80s wedding dress that transcends that decade because my mother got married in the 80s and her dress was definitely not something I could've worn at my 2011 wedding without looking like I was playing dress up! But the idea is lovely and Paige is singleminded in her attempts to track down the dress.

Whilst Paige is busy with all that, Rebecca is ruminating on a deep and dark secret she's been keeping for 35 years and having regrets brought on by her diagnosis. She knows that it's time to come clean but when she does, it's going to have devastating repercussions for her family. For me, this was a seriously strong part of the book. Both Rebecca's daughter and her husband react strongly to Rebecca's news and the fact that she's kept it a secret for so long and their reactions are ugly and bitter and hurtful and well, real. It's how I think I'd imagine reacting if I found out my husband or parents had kept something from me like that, because I'm the sort of person that knee-jerk reacts to something and then has to calm down. I found it so sad for Rebecca at times, but I could also understand the intense hurt and frustration from both Hugh and Paige at discovering this news. It's raw and for me, believable and true. It takes a while for each of them to work through their feelings and you can tell that it is something they do have to really work at. Rather than just being shocked and then being fine with it moments later.

Rebecca and Paige meet Clara and Josie throughout the book (and Clara and Josie also meet through other avenues) and the four of them become incredibly entangled in ways that strengthen them individually and also together as they forge friendships but there's also a lot of hidden secrets that come tumbling out which also complicates their connections as well as changing and evolving them. I loved some of the reveals in this, they were all so well done and (I have always said this) show how well Rachael Johns excels at writing relationships and interactions between people. She just gets the way that people connect and also how they fall apart. There's a lot of emotion in this book but it never feels over the top or cheesy, not does it feel contrived. There are several couples in this – two already married, one engaged and one couple are divorced.

The couple that are divorced, Clara and Rob, have endured a lot of loss and heartache in their lives and Rob in particular has never quite been able to learn to cope with that or find a successful way to deal with the feelings it evokes in him. He turns to the bottle and when he and Clara eventually divorce (at Clara's instigation) it seems that Rob continues to spiral downward, clinging to Clara and what they shared (and lost) while Clara just wants to move on. She wants a clean break, a fresh start, the potential for companionship and laughter again. Rob, although he only really appears in the book a couple of times, was very well written. His dependency on alcohol is given background and context and he becomes a truly sympathetic character as the depth of his regret and pain is realised. I feel as though the choice for him was the brave one, but the right one in terms of the story being told and the set up. It seemed the only (unfortunately) logical conclusion and because of that, it would allow the other characters to connect and move forward.

This was beautifully heartwarming and full of emotional depth. There are a few coincidences pinning the story together, not going to lie but they're easy to just go with because the story is so well written. A good book can make you believe anything and this book had no trouble convincing me.

A copy of this book was provided by the publisher for the purpose of an honest review

Lily Malone says

I didn't quite get into this on an emotional level like other readers have, but I finished it and enjoyed working through to the end. My problem I think came because I found it difficult to buy-in to particularly Hugh and Paige's reaction to Rebecca's secret. I tried to think how I'd react to learning this news, and I just can't see that I'd be so mean! I liked Josie best, and Nik and Solomon were lovely, and I enjoyed how the author worked through the POV characters. One thing I liked was it always felt like a good time to swap in and out of the storyline and I didn't feel that one character got too much airtime and another was forgotten.
