



The Dead Wife's Handbook

Hannah Beckerman

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'Today is my death anniversary. A year ago today I was still alive.'

Rachel, Max and their daughter Ellie had the perfect life - until the night Rachel's heart stopped beating.

Now Max and Ellie are doing their best to adapt to life without Rachel, and just as her family can't forget her, Rachel can't quite let go of them either. Caught in a place between worlds, Rachel watches helplessly as she begins to fade from their lives. And when Max is persuaded by family and friends to start dating again, Rachel starts to understand that dying was just the beginning of her problems.

As Rachel grieves for the life she's lost and the life she'll never lead, she learns that sometimes the thing that breaks your heart might be the very thing you hope for.

Hannah Beckerman gives an unforgettable exploration of love and loss in her first novel, *The Dead Wife's Handbook*.

The Dead Wife's Handbook Details

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Author : Hannah Beckerman

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From Reader Review *The Dead Wife's Handbook* for online ebook

Margaret Madden says

Rachel is dead. She looks down from above as her husband, Max and her seven year old daughter, Ellie, try to continue their lives without her. She feels the pain as much as anyone alive would, maybe even more. It's raw, intense and heartbreaking. Unlike the living, there is no way to send her loved ones a message. She has no control over when she can see them, sometimes months going by. Then things start to get very emotional as she watches her husband dip his feet back into the dating world....

" My mind surrenders to an army of schizophrenic thoughts. Rationally I know that I'm dead, that Max is a widower, that he's free to pursue other relationships. Rationally I don't want him to be unhappy, in mourning and lonely forever. But those rational feelings aren't sufficiently robust to repel an onslaught of irrational impulses, that Max has betrayed me, that he's moved on too quickly, that he's desecrated the memory of our marriage with this act of emotional and physical treachery. And stoking the flames of envy's fury are those repetitive, invidious images of what I presume took place last night. "

This novel explores the deepest thoughts of Rachel, as she has no choice but to be a witness at the changing lives of her family. We see Max and Ellie try to move on with their lives but we also see Rachel's mother, who is grief stricken and alone, many miles away from her granddaughter and any link she had to Rachel. We also see Rachel's best friend, of many years, as she struggles with Max's new life and all that entails.

The main characters, however, are Max and Ellie. When I read the first few chapters I couldn't help but think of the discussions I have had with my own husband about whether I would want him finding someone new after my death, or whether he should stay a faithful widower. We are expected to say we want them to move on with their lives and find happiness if we are taken from them early. That may not be what we are really thinking though, as to watch the love of your life meet someone new scares the hell out of some of us. Maybe we would never know. May not be able to see anything when we have passed on. Who knows? This novel will make you think about it a bit more. It might even make you appreciate what you have, even more than usual.

Dawn says

I won a signed copy of this novel in a competition and couldn't wait to read it and post a review for Hannah who I got to know a bit about after spending time chatting with her on twitter. I went on to choose this as the March read for the book group I'm a member of which is why I didn't want to post my review until after the meeting.

The first thing that drew me in was the gorgeous cover - the colours are so vibrant and stunning - I just wanted to pick it up and run my hands repeatedly over it. The synopsis also hooked me as it hinted at an unusual story that piqued my interest - I'd always thought I'd like to be able to check on the family if I was to go first!!

The book revolves around Rachel, who dies suddenly, without warning and that of her husband Max and daughter Ellie, along with their family and friends who are trying to help them build a new life for themselves without Rachel. Rachel is able to glimpse snippets of her former life through a cloud like haze

and the story is told through her.

I knew this book would be an emotional one - who wouldn't be moved by the grief of a family struggling to rebuild their lives after the mother is snatched from them? What I wasn't prepared for was the range of emotions I felt. This book was of a size that I'd normally devour in the course of a week-end but it took me almost a week to read as I had to keep stopping to gather my thoughts.

Hannah's descriptions were so vivid - I cried, I laughed and I had arguments inside my head and willed things to happen or not! Whoever thought it might be nice to peak at 'your' life after you've gone is an idiot, it felt like such an act of cruelty. The total opposite of what I thought would be quite nice. If you couldn't be with your loved ones any longer, at least you'd still feel part of their lives by watching in - absolutely not!! Watching them suffer, and not being able to comfort and then the pain of watching them move on would be horrendous. I physically felt Rachel's pain - only able to observe, not scoop up her daughter and kiss her better. Max, how could you let your friends, mother and brother tell you to get 'out there' after only a year?

For me this book was very thought provoking, I've discussed it not just at book group but with other friends too. I've recommended it to everyone who'll listen to me - it's really made me search my soul. I have decided though, when I'm gone, I'm gone! I don't want to be able look down and suffer because I can't touch or hold my family and friends when they need me most, instead I'll try to show and tell them now whilst I'm here.

I can only imagine the tears Hannah must have shed whilst writing this book. The emotions I felt were raw and quite real. I love a book that makes me think and question life and situations and two weeks after finishing this book I'm still doing just that. Grief affects us all differently and the fact that Rachel, Max, Ellie and their friends and family were at different stages made it all the more difficult. My heart literally broke in particular for Rachel and Ellie - you can't replace a mother/daughter relationship but in Eve, Hannah I think you gave us the next best thing.

This is a truly amazing book which I have gladly recommended to all of my friends.

Bookevin says

www.iheart-chicklit.blogspot.com

I was so thrilled to be offered a review copy of Hannah Beckerman's debut novel, *The Dead Wife's Handbook*, which sounds like an amazing read, judging from the blurb. It's a completely different side of women's fiction I was excited to explore and it really did open my eyes to what the more emotional, darker side (not in a bad way!) of chick lit had to offer!

The Dead Wife's Handbook follows the story of Rachel, who dies unexpectedly, leaving behind her beloved husband and the apple of her eye, Ellie, her daughter. As she watches from above, she witnesses her loved ones coping with grief, afraid of moving on, while she painfully undergoes the seven stages of grief. Well, because her death and sudden departure is just the beginning of her problems..

Before reading the entire book, I thought it would be about a deceased heroine, struggling with life after death. But I was so wrong. I was completely thrown when I realised that there's so much more when it

comes to Rachel's side of her story. Her story doesn't end after her death. No, Hannah Beckerman tells it through poignant, yet nostalgic vignettes that will allow us readers to glimpse into Rachel's life as a wife, mother and friend, pre-arrhythmia, through a series of flashbacks and reminiscences.

Right from the start, I could really "connect" with Rachel. As a reader to character, if that makes any sense. There were parts in the novel, which were written so achingly painful, my heart went out to her, and some parts made me clench my fists, defensive and protective of Rachel's feelings. All I'm saying is that the characters in the book are incredibly "real", written with such precise touch.

The Dead Wife's Handbook is filled with emotion, raw and real, which will no doubt be the tearjerker of the year, if you ask me. Hannah Beckerman, a supposed debut novelist has made her mark in women's fiction with such a beautifully written novel which will no doubt tug your heartstrings. I adored this book so much because it's such a treasure to read. Hannah Beckerman's writing flows smoothly through the pages and if you read aloud, it's even poetic (I might have read a few chapters.. aloud!), with elegant and lyrical prose.

All in all, The Dead Wife's Handbook is truly remarkable and unforgettable. An emotional roller coaster which will linger in the little memory box in your head, provoking you to think of the "what ifs". An exceptional debut novel, if you ask me. I think I've run out of superlatives to describe the book. My parting words: Go get it!

MyGoodBookshelf says

I have reviewed this book here: <http://mygoodbookshelf.wordpress.com/...>

Megan Readinginthesunshine says

I had been interested in The Dead Wife's Handbook long before I read it, I'd heard so many good things about it and I was SO intrigued by not only the title but the blurb on the back too, it sounded so fascinating and I couldn't wait to get started.

Rachel had the perfect life – a husband she loved with all of her heart and their beautiful daughter Ellie. Things were beautiful and their life was perfect – until the moment Rachel's heart stopped beating. Now Max and Ellie are struggling to get used to life without her, and it isn't just them who are finding it hard. Rachel may be dead but she is stuck, left to watch fragments of their life helplessly without being able to be involved. And when Max is persuaded by family and friends to start dating again, Rachel finds that she is helpless as life begins to move on without her...

Wow. I went through such a range of emotions whilst reading this book. As Rachel is the narrator of the story, we see what she sees and so it was easy to relate to her. Over the course of the book I felt very close to her as I knew all of her thoughts and feelings. I felt so sad for her as her emotions radiated from the pages and seeped into me as well – I felt so sad that she couldn't be there for her daughter, my heart ached as I realised Rachel wouldn't be there for her as she grew up and be able to experience all the important moments in Ellie's life. I had mixed feelings on Max dating again in the beginning, yes no one would want their husband to be sad and upset forever but oh how my heart broke for Rachel, to know that the absolute love of her life was beginning to go out and meet other women. I thought about how I personally would feel, I could

feel Rachel's frustrations and I could really relate to her in that moment.

I loved Rachel and Max's daughter Ellie, I felt for her from the beginning and on many occasions I wanted to reach into the book, sweep her up into a hug and try to comfort her. My heart literally broke for her as she came to the realisation that her mum would never be returning.

Every aspect of grief is very well written about, Hannah has really captured this perfectly and the entire story is a compelling and emotional journey, not only for Rachel, Max and Ellie, but for me too. I genuinely felt so touched and moved by the story.

It is not all sadness though, there some very uplifting moments, and it is wonderful to spend some time with the characters! Ellie was my favourite, I loved her happier moments, the times that she got to have fun and enjoy herself.

This is true story of grief, but also of learning, of remembering the happy times, and of acceptance too. The Dead Wife's Handbook is a captivating story that will take you on an emotional journey. I'm looking forward to reading more from Hannah.

Erin says

Firstly, a massive thank you to Katie Sheldrake at Penguin and Hannah for sending me a copy of this gorgeous, gorgeous book to review.

Before we even talk about the book, how beautiful is the cover? I was definitely drawn to it and even though we're taught not to judge a book by its cover, this cover really speaks for the book - beautiful inside and out. If you follow me on twitter you will no doubt have seen the many conversations I've had with other bloggers about the book, and just how great it is, and if that isn't enough to entice you, let me tell you some more about it.

Rachel has been dead for a year now, and with her untimely death has come the ability to have vicarious access to the living world so that she can watch her husband Max and daughter Ellie cope without her and try to move on from the tragedy they've all been through, to get back to living their lives.

I really liked the premise of the story from the start. It's different, particularly because your main character is usually alive, and not existing in some version of an afterlife, while they are narrating the story. Rachel's access is sporadic and unpredictable which seemed quite harsh to begin with, as if everything is out of her control, her death that she certainly wasn't ready for, her choice of afterlife semi-existence, and her choice of the living moments she's allowed to view. That kind of sets the tone for the whole book, getting you instantly on Rachel's side, allowing you to really empathise with her because after all, wouldn't we all feel just as helpless as she is in her situation?

Rachel's afterlife is described so eloquently that you can't help but imagine yourself in it with her. Her character has a depth that allows you to appreciate her short life, her memories and the emotional state she find herself in almost instantly. All of the characters actually, are described really well, leaving you in no way second guessing how they are feeling and I thought that was really important in such an emotionally

charged book.

“Just one more kiss, That’s all I want.”

I was on the verge of tears quite a lot throughout the book, and actually cried a handful of times as well. You go through the grieving process with the family, but I always felt like I was on Rachel’s side. Her thoughts and views on how her family were continuing with their lives became mine and I found myself, not only upset, but angry and also resentful along with her.

Although I felt very close to Rachel as the main character, my favourite was her daughter Ellie. I loved her innocence and got a real sense of it from the description of her and her actions and all of her questions about Rachel and moving on.

The story is challenging in that you find yourself asking yourself if you’ve lived the life you wanted to live, if you’ve made the impression you wanted to make. It makes you consider the “What ifs”. The unpredictability of life is something that is very tangible to every one of us and it’s something that should never be underestimated. This book really made me think about that, and made me want to make sure that everyone who is important to me knows just how important they are.

This is such an incredible story, it’s undeniably moving and thought provoking. It has the potential to change your life.

Trish Hills says

I really like the concept of this book. Having lost my Mum in 2010, I often think of her and wonder if she’s watching over me. I like to think she is. Hannah writes this story so beautifully and with such tenderness, it really made me believe that my Mum is still around me.

Little Ellie is so wise, so inquisitive and contemplative. I love the way she thinks about things and the non-stop questions when she is gripped by a topic. I felt like I had shared all the happy times with her and Rachel. She is exactly what I’d like to think my own little girl would be like one day. Max is a lovely character and such a wonderful husband and father. He really is so warm and gentle with Ellie and all of the people in his life who loved his late wife. Connor and Harriet are such great supporting characters too. I wish I had a Harriet in my life!

I laughed, cried, smiled, remembered and felt. I love books that make me feel! I have recently been criticized for giving too many 5 star reviews, but I can’t help it! There are too many amazing books out there now! This is certainly another one of them!

A beautiful, heart warming, tender, bitter sweet story of love and loss! 5/5

Sarah Farmer-wright says

This is the story of the sudden, untimely demise of Rachel from a fatal cardiac arrhythmia, the journey through grief that Rachel and her family must take. This is a unique story with an interesting concept of a beyond the grave "netherworld" from where Rachel is granted "access" to view the family and friends she left behind, and see how they cope with her death and ultimately move on with their lives. Nicely based on the seven stages of grief identified by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross - shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, acceptance - not only from the perspective of Rachel's family but also, interestingly, from Rachel's perspective as well. It's message is a potentially profound one, but, for me, it felt disappointingly flat. I keenly felt Rachel's abject loneliness being trapped alone in the "whiteness" of the netherworld, and her helplessness bearing witness to new relationships and life she so desperately still wants to be part of, moving on without her; and I liked the overall message of the book - of love being our greatest legacy, but everything in between felt devoid of real feeling and the characters (with the exception of Rachel) lacked any credible or believable substance. It was all a bit too "chick lit" for me - not my cup of tea I'm sorry to say.

Emely says

This book is full of "perfect" characters who always say and do the right thing. The dialogue is completely unrealistic, especially for a 7/8 year old. Not to mention all of the characters had the exact same voice.

Liz Barnsley says

‘Today is my death anniversary. A year ago today I was still alive.’ As Rachel grieves for the life she’s lost and the life she’ll never lead, she learns that sometimes the thing that breaks your heart might be the very thing you hope for.

I had been looking forward to this one, something slightly out of my “comfort” zone but one that sounded like it might end up being quite beautiful in the right hands and that was exactly how it turned out.

We follow along with Rachel, who died suddenly and unexpectedly from a heart problem, as she is allowed glimpses into the lives of the people she left behind..and in this creatively imagined way we ourselves catch a glimpse into the very real stages of grief. It is a gorgeous heartwarming tale, often bringing a tear to my eye...at the same time being full of a rather hopeful cathartic feel as all concerned come to terms with tragedy.

It is quite difficult to put into words how emotive this one was for me – so I’ll try and use my own perspective to give you an insight. I lost my Father when I was very young (not nearly as young as Ellie but far too young none the less) so it was easy for me to identify with her and understand what she was going through...and indeed what Max was going through as he tried to help her and himself. Then I am a mother of children similarly aged to Ellie – the very thought of not being around to see them through their childhood is horrific. Any mother will feel the same and will therefore be able to relate to Rachel, looking down occasionally but being unable to take back what was lost.

This novel captures the sense of so many things – love, loss, friendship, sadness, and hope..and how all things move forward over time. A tale of grief told from a unique perspective, beautifully written, heartfelt

and impassioned, this one will have you reaching for the tissues...some of those tears will be happy ones. Most of all this is about love...and how sometimes that means letting go...

Highly Recommended.

Happy Reading Folks!

Kayla says

Predictable. Sad. Characters that are stereotypes. I should just stick with the presidential debates.

Ana says

Also posted on This Chick Reads

Copy provided by publisher in exchange for an honest review

'The Dead Wife's Handbook' is one of the best and most original books I've ever read. It's deep, emotional and thought-provoking. When Hannah shared her first chapter I knew I had to immediately check it out. I was hooked from the very first page. I had tears in my eyes from reading the first couple of sentences:

"I didn't mean to die so young. I don't suppose anyone does. I don't suppose many people would willingly fail to reach their thirty-seventh birthday or their eighth wedding anniversary or see out their daughter's seventh year on the planet. I suspect there aren't many people who would voluntarily relinquish all that, given the choice."

Rachel didn't have a choice. She didn't even know she had a poor heart until that day she felt a strong pain in her chest and died at the age of 36, leaving her beloved husband Max and 6 year old daughter Ellie to mourn for her. But it's not only them who're grieving, Rachel is having a hard time adjusting to the fact she will no longer be able to see or touch her family, that she won't be able to see Ellie grow up, not be able to see her finish school, fall in love, get married.

Now i told you this is an emotional book, and as you see you'll probably need tons of tissues when reading it. But what I found really fascinating was the way this book was cleverly divided in parts which showed the things Rachel was going through, the different stages starting from shock, to denial, anger etc. As human beings, we might be different when it comes to many things, but we sure are so similar when it comes to grief, pain and loss. We all feel it and we have a hard time accepting the loss. The Dead Wife's Handbook is such a wonderful book, yet reading it was such a strange experience. I've never thought about what would happen to my loved ones if I died, totally unexpected just like Rachel did. Because, as much as everyone says they'd want their loved ones to move on, is it really something we'd want?

Maybe I'm nothing like Rachel, but I am a woman, a wife and a mother, so I could really connect with her. I

could feel her pain, her grief, her worst fears. She's torn, fearing she'd be forgotten, and that might be worse than the actual death.

“It's not the mortality of the body that's the real tragedy of the dead. It's the dissolution of memory. For the dead, to be forgotten is as if never to have lived at all.”

But though this book will make you cry like a baby, it is definitely not just a book about dying or overcoming loss. It's about love, that unconditional love we feel for our children, that imprint we leave behind and that continues to speak about who we were. It's about the importance of family, of loving and being loved, of sharing memories and holding on to them when everything is lost. Because those memories are who we were, who we are, they define us.

I swear, I could talk about this book for hours, and I must say it is an excellent choice for Book Clubs or groups who'd want a fantastic book that will provoke so much discussing on many topics. But it all goes down to this: 'The Dead Wife's Handbook' might be a debut but it's a masterpiece! And no matter how hard I try to explain just how fabulous this book is, I'm sure I'll never be able to. It's such a powerful, deep, emotional, thought-provoking book you definitely don't want to miss out on. I'm sure you'll love both the powerful message behind it as well as Hannah's unique, fresh and beautiful writing style. A true MASTERPIECE that will stay with you long after you've read it! I bow to you Hannah!

Christine says

Rachel has died suddenly, leaving behind a husband and child. She continues to look down on her family, as they grieve and move on.

This was such a difficult read for me. It brought back too many memories of my Dad's death and how I felt as a child. It completely impacted on how I viewed the book.

I felt very uncomfortable reading about Rachel and how she resented the living making a new life, without her. I've always got a great deal of comfort from believing our loved ones want us to continue to be happy, even without them. At times, I felt quite sick hearing of Rachel's jealousy and selfishness. I found it hard to relate to her because of it. Surely if you love people, you want them to move on from the trauma of death and be happy again?

I had an issue with the daughter, Ellie. She was continually called various pet names, 'sweetheart' being the least annoying. It was too over the top. I would have preferred her to be portrayed as a more rounded child, rather than stereotyped as being perfect. Every character made excuses for what I perceived as bratty behaviour. I found the way her father explained everything to her totally unrealistic. In my experience, children do not have every single thing spelled out for them. They just have to cope with change and adjust.

I love that the theme of death and coming to terms with death is used. I've often thought that it's important these issues are talked about more in our culture. Death is such a taboo and it's a fascinating subject. My experience of it is that people do not continually talk about the person who has died, like Max did with his daughter.

Overall it felt quite traumatic and uncomfortable to read. I loved Eve the most, out of all of the characters. I just disliked the over analytical side to it. It didn't seem realistic to me. Death is more chaotic. This is one of

those books that we bring all of our past experiences to and frame it in reference to them. I suspect that my response to this book comes from comparisons with my childhood and how my family reacted. I remember believing my Dad was continuing to watch over me and love me from a distance. I'm very sure my Dad would not have been anything like Rachel. I urge caution if deciding to read this book.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

The Dead Wife's Handbook by Hannah Beckerman is a story of love, grief and letting go. Rachel was just thirty six years old when her heart stopped beating. She was happily married to Max and a loving mother to five year old Ellie, now she floats in a void of white mist given intermittent views of her husband and daughter struggling to live without her.

The idea of a ghostly narrator is a not a new one and the story offers no real surprises. It begins to feel a bit repetitive after a while, for Max and Ellie it's one step forward, two steps back, for Rachel - endless longing and a predictable cycle of guilt, resentment and despair.

I think it was just that characters were all just too perfect - Rachel was the perfect wife and mother, Max the perfect husband and father, and Ellie, who is just too perfectly adorable for words. Oh and Eve, Eve is perfect too. Their grief often seemed too neat, too contained and Max always seemed to be able to find the right words to comfort Ellie.

I did empathise with Rachel, after all I am a mother and I would be horrified to be in her place, but for the unwary reader, particularly one recently bereaved I don't think The Dead Wife's Handbook would offer much comfort. The lessons she learns about love, life and death are true enough but cliched.

The Dead Wife's Handbook has received a plethora of positive reviews, I just wasn't feeling it.

Karen says

“.....I wonder, too, whether it’s more distressing to watch your family in mourning for you or whether it will be worse when, one day, they stop grieving and start living painlessly without me”.

We know from the very first page that Rachel has died unexpectedly, after a celebratory evening out with her husband Max, and is now completely alone, somewhere in the afterworld. Every so often she is briefly granted access to view moments with Max and/or Ellie and we experience with her, her grief and anger that she is no longer with them to offer reassurance and comfort.

This afterworld is not a happy place where families are reunited in death, but is bleak and lonely for Rachel and her time spent watching her loved ones are times of both happiness and agony as she sees them grieving and feels helpless in being unable to make them aware of her presence. We see her frustration and jealousy as Max starts to date again and her worries that she will be forgotten and that her memory will be slowly erased from their lives.

This is a compelling and beautifully written account of Rachel’s transition through the grieving process and

watching others live the life that she will never have. Unusually, we see the aftermath of a death through the eyes of the deceased and it presents a powerful image. Having been through the grieving process myself I could identify with Rachel's feelings of loss. The writing was perceptive and warm with some amusing moments, especially with Max's first attempts at dating!

Despite being an incredibly poignant and sad story, this is not a morbid book by any means. The characters are a joy to spend time with, especially 6 year old Ellie, and Max's devotion to her was lovely to see. The book isn't all about Rachel and certainly the main characters in Rachel's life are rounded and believable. I really felt for Max when well meaning friends and family tried to persuade him to "move on". At the end of each stage of the grieving process, Rachel learns something about herself and it is this journey of realisation that adds an extra element to the story.

I found this an emotional and yet uplifting read and I became completely engrossed in the lives, and death, of Rachel and her family. This is an excellent debut novel which I would have no hesitation in recommending. Just one tip – make sure you have some tissues handy!

My thanks to Real Readers and the publisher, Penguin, for the review copy of this book. I certainly look forward to reading further books by Ms Beckerman.
