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Anna George

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David Forrester and Elle Nolan are sophisticated, mature people who don't understand love. They live in a world where love is revered but marriages commonly end in divorce, or worse.

When jaded lawyer David meets Elle, he decides she's his last chance of happiness and does everything he can to woo her and keep her. Everything, that is, except face his demons.

Elle, a lawyer herself once but now a blossoming filmmaker, is done with heartbreak. But romance can be intoxicating and David is determined.

Over the course of one ill-fated night, David and Elle recount the journey of their love affair. And it begins with David admitting into his dictaphone to the killing of Elle.

Hovering above her broken body, Elle sees the sweep of her life, its triumphs and its mistakes. She sees how, when she first met David, her newfound success as a filmmaker had made her reckless and her idealised ideas about romance misled her.

As the night progresses, we learn their story of a love of unprecedented intensity; a love David was compelled, at turns, to destroy. A love that Elle has yet to survive.

Visceral and compelling, What Came Before creates a chilling modern portrait of the dark side of love.

What Came Before Details

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Author : Anna George

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From Reader Review What Came Before for online ebook

Faye says

Ok loved this book, was fairly fast moving, at first I thought it was Ella that was a bit weird but then as the story went on I realised that it was David. Ending not what I thought. Would read another novel if Anna George writes one.

Carol - Reading Writing and Riesling says

My View:

After reading this book the hardest question I must ask myself is which part of me responds to this book and therefore determines how the review will be written; is it the view point of a Women's Studies Graduate (B Soc Sc), is it the view point of a once upon a time worker in a Women's Refuge, is it the viewpoint of a worker in the Film and Television Industry, is the view point of a passionate crime fiction/psychological thriller reader or the view point of a modern mature woman who has experienced some of the manipulation and violence described in this novel? I think the answer to this question is a complicated one but I guess I will write a little from all perspectives and maybe a whole lot about how I responded to this brilliant expose of domestic violence and *limerence which coincidentally is the title of the film Elle writes in this novel – her story one of a of life imitating film... the script Dave helped to create.

Anan George writes a compelling narrative about spinning out of control with the giddiness of love; the type of love written about in romance books, portrayed on the big and little screen, of intense attachments and the willingness to suspend any doubts or faults of the person you attach the limerence to- besotted, infatuated, devoted...in love... doesn't begin to describe the intensity of the feeling that you need to be reciprocated. You cannot survive without your partner and when cracks in the relationship start to show you work hard to cover them up and believe you can help mend these ugly traits. You ignore the little warnings, hairs that rise on the back of your neck, the words spoken harshly or loudly, the grip on your arm... the simmering below the surface barely controlled violence you can feel – you tell yourself you can change them (you can't), you blame yourself for causing the black moods (you didn't), you look for excuses to tell yourself or try to placate the violator and try and diffuse any anger before it explodes; you become responsible for his rage (how can that be?). Eventually the limerence fades and you are stuck in a relationship that most find hard to escape without help – and the violator has already done a really good job of isolating you from your friends and support networks – work and personal and has beaten your self-esteem to a tatter, all that is left is an unravelling thread...Such is the love Elle feels for Dave. Such is the damage he inflicts upon her.

To say this is a powerful emotional read is an understatement. To say this is a powerful psychological thriller is simply stating the truth. Anna George generates such authentic voices in the voices of Dave and of Elle; the script between them, internalised and spoken is so potent and accurate the hairs on the back of my neck were standing up! These two characters are intricately and vibrantly drawn.

Thorough this narrative we experience some very poignant revelations and some very clever use of stories within the story; Elle reads a book by Katherine Hepburn who painfully disclosures her own sad relationship with Spencer Tracey – a love that diminished her sense of self; "after almost three decades with Spencer Tracy, the great Kate hadn't known why she stayed with him. She hadn't known his feelings for her. But she'd tended to him happily and tried hard not to ruffle him. She'd even tried to forsake some of her best

qualities because she suspected he didn't like them. Because what they had, for her at least, was bliss." Elle eventually recognises that she too has surrendered her own sense of self to appease her husband and subdue the menace that lives within him. Her film now imitates the life she now has – of two dancers out of sync, out of step... involved in a dangerous dance.

Elle's life, like so many others, is one where domestic violence is a lesson learned firsthand. As Elle states; "She was taught nothing of the risks posed by those who claim to love you, the risks that manifest at night in family kitchens, or after the party. It would have helped, she thought, if someone had explained the warning signs: the mood swings and outbursts. And what they were; covert attempts to control. Then she could have had a language and a context for how she felt today. Better she would have been forewarned." Thanks Anna George for opening up this dialogue, for giving us words and language and emotions and consequences that enable such conversations to be had.

Control...treating women as objects, possessions, using violence, threats, manipulation and abuse; physical, sexual and psychological (and in some cases economic control over) are all part of the bag of tricks used to control others (usually women). As Reg (retired Queen's Counsel) states to Dave "You cannot kill your wife because you have lost control of her...And we cannot continue to blame women for their death."... "I gather you were hoping for reconciliation and she was being difficult? What precisely did she say or do?" Reg suggests it is preferable to face the consequences than hide from them...no chance. Dave cannot take any control or responsibility for his actions. It is always someone else's fault. "She made me...."

Back to the book- a stunning cast, a wonderfully complex plot, a few twists and turns and a surprise ending; drama, tragedy, love, marriage, death, violence- real and perceived ...dark and atmospheric, this book has it all and shares it's story powerfully and honestly.

*Limerence is an involuntary state of mind which results from a romantic attraction to another person combined with an overwhelming, obsessive need to have one's feelings reciprocated. The psychologist Dorothy Tennov coined the term "limerence" in her 1979 book *Love and Limerence: The Experience of Being in Love* to describe the concept that had grown out of her work in the mid-1960s, when she interviewed over 500 people on the topic of love.[1]

More recently, limerence has been defined in relation to obsessive compulsive disorder as "an involuntary interpersonal state that involves intrusive, obsessive, and compulsive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are contingent on perceived emotional reciprocation from the object of interest".[2] Limerence has also been defined in terms of the potentially inspirational effects and the relationship to attachment theory, which is not exclusively sexual, as being "an involuntary potentially inspiring state of adoration and attachment to a limerent object involving intrusive and obsessive thoughts, feelings and behaviors from euphoria to despair, contingent on perceived emotional reciprocation" Attachment theory emphasizes that "many of the most intense emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption, and the renewal of attachment relationships".[4] It has been suggested that "the state of limerence is the conscious experience of sexual incentive motivation" during attachment formation: "a kind of subjective experience of sexual incentive motivation"[5] during the "intensive...pair-forming stage"[6] of human affectionate bonding.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Limerence>

Tracey Allen at Carpe Librum says

* Copy courtesy of The Reading Room and Penguin Random House *

What Came Before is the debut novel from Anna George, a Melbourne based author with a background as a lawyer.

Set in suburban Melbourne, this novel about love and domestic violence has one of the best opening lines I've read all year, and it certainly sucks you in from the beginning:

"My name is David James Forrester. I'm a solicitor. Tonight, at 6.10, I killed my wife. This is my statement."

This psychological thriller is told in flash back sequences by David's wife Elle Nolan, as she is floating above her broken body, a victim of domestic violence. We also hear David's perspective as he panics and tries to grapple with his foul deed.

What Came Before is an interesting and slightly disturbing insight into a seemingly normal relationship and it's steady decline. Knowing the ending doesn't detract from the plot, and I think it's a good warning for those finding themselves in a troubled relationship.

My only problem was that I recently read *Into the Darkest Corner* by Elizabeth Haynes, which is a hard hitting account of domestic violence that was a brilliant read (I wanted to give it 5 1/2 stars it was that good). *What Came Before* was more subtle, but after reading *Into The Darkest Corner* two months ago, I can't help comparing my reading experiences.

If you're looking for a psychological thriller set in Australia or in Melbourne, then I highly recommend *What Came Before*.

Sami Lambe says

'What Came Before' is a compelling book to read. Once I started I could not put it down until I had finished reading it. I don't want to give away too much – the scariest and perhaps the saddest thread that runs throughout the novel is, as alluded in the tag line 'how could love go so wrong'. I strongly recommend to all those who have ever fallen in love that went wrong to read. You will find it too close to reality. I wouldn't be surprised if 'What Came Before' ends up becoming the best seller for 2014.

Elaine says

Did I read somewhere that this is a debut novel? Yes I think I did and all I can say is wow!!! If this is an example of what this author has to offer and not beginner's luck then I can't wait for what's to come....no pun intended!!! As far as thrillers go this was up there with some of the best. It was a compelling, nail biting, heart thumping read. Not always an easy read but one that hooks you in from the beginning and keeps you reading to the very end. It brings out many emotions and has you screaming at Elle in frustration but also at the same time you feel for her and her predicament. Mostly it is not what it seems and twisting and turning to

the end it keeps you guessing. A great read and one I don't hesitate to recommend. Thanks to my GR friend Brenda for my copy, which in hindsight I can't believe I waited so long to read.

Brenda says

When David Forrester met Elle Nolan, they were both outside the Sun Theatre in Melbourne. Elle was a script writer and had one film to her credit; she was currently working on her second script. The attraction between them both, especially on David's side, was instant – after the film and drinks at the bar, they ended up at Elle's place – he admired the décor of her apartment, then they moved on to each other...

As their relationship intensified Elle found herself pulling back – David's moods were up one minute and down the next. Elle was never sure which David would knock on her door. But even with the volatile nature of what they had, Elle still loved David; when they married she was extremely happy – this was forever she thought.

Suddenly though, two years after they first met, everything went wrong. David's voice came through, weak and tormented:

"My name is David James Forrester. I'm a solicitor. Tonight, at 6.10 I killed my wife. This is my statement".

With the beginning of the book starting with the above statement, we know what happens – don't we? The deep emotion, the passionate intimacy – all are covered in this novel. I quite enjoyed the nature of the plot with the intrigue that was built in all the way through. But I didn't love the characters, and I guess they weren't meant to be loved. The issue of domestic violence is blended into the pages with ease; the frustration of needing to yell at Elle was great! Her best friend had no success with her! I think this will be one of those novels which will create great debate and for that reason I have no hesitation in recommending it.

With thanks to The Reading Room and the publisher for my copy to read and review.

Jane says

I bought this book as part of an author night at our local cafe a week ago. I've already finished it & passed it on to a friend! Gripping, well written, amazing insight into relationships. Wow! I know it took Anna many years to write this, so I can only hope her next book doesn't take so long cos I can't wait to read it. An amazing first novel.

Karen says

Are you allowed to write reviews that just say "WOW"? No, well okay - an explanation of why "wow".

From the opening lines of WHAT CAME BEFORE it's hard not to be hooked. The man talking directly to the reader has just killed his wife. He's a lawyer, so his immediate reaction is to record his statement of events - into a dictaphone, sitting in his car. In the background there's the quiet, subdued voice of his wife.

Hovering there in the laundry, also talking directly to the reader. Not as often, and not in a strong voice. Well you wouldn't if you were staring at your own lifeless form would you?

Sceptical readers, such as this one, might take one look at this aspect and roll eyes. Woo Woo is something that can be very hard to swallow, particularly in a storyline as confrontational as this. Ignore it. For reasons that are almost as hard again to describe, Elle's voice works. It's low key and somehow it provides a counterpoint to the panicked and fearful reactions of David.

WHAT CAME BEFORE takes a couple of brave directions. For a start there's the close up voice of David, confessing to the murder, explaining how he and Elle came to be. Drawing the reader right in close to the car crash that his life seems to be. Along the way the backstory of the couple is revealed. In the second direction, both Elle and David are, in their own ways, unpleasant. Okay, David wins in that he's the one who strangled his wife, but neither of these people are exactly warm, comforting, kind and gentle people. Their relationship is fraught and dramatic and on again off again, which makes their ultimate marriage even more difficult to understand. In fact, all the way through this plot there's no point at which you can ever figure out why. Why they paired up, why they stayed together, what on earth they were both thinking. Obviously neither of these characters quite see it like that and that's part of the poignancy.

Which brings us to the unexpected elements. WHAT CAME BEFORE is surprisingly poignant. It's hard to watch a car crash in the making for miles and miles. It's hard to watch two people that might be a bit unpleasant but surely don't deserve to do this to themselves or each other. It's hard to watch David's panic, and Elle's amazement at their fate. It's hard to like David, it's hard to like Elle, but it gets easier to understand them.

Which brings me back to the summary line. WHAT CAME BEFORE was simply, flat out a WOW read - couldn't believe it, couldn't put it down, can't forget it.

<http://www.austcrimefiction.org/review/what-came-before>

??Jülie ? says

What Came Before....

Many Thanks to NetGalley, The Reading Room & Penguin Australia for this Uncorrected proof copy.

WOW!!!

A bit of a slow start until about page 50 (for me)...I would suggest reading a few chapters straight through without breaking...or until the thread or gist is picked up.

There are some overly graphic descriptions of the sex scenes, pretty much from the beginning, this was a bit off putting and almost caused me to quit as it was so early into the book I wondered where it could go from there. Even by the end I wondered at the relevance or the need for so much vivid detail.

Having said that, I am so glad I didn't put it down because things did start to improve around 50 pages in and the story really started to pick up pace and began to go somewhere....*Freaking Scary!!*

It suddenly gets very intense and confronting,...*this stuff happens!!!! Oh - My - God!!!* I had to keep

stopping to take a deep breath and collect myself.

In a nutshell, It is the story of one woman's struggle against the manipulative powers of the man she loves, and the sad yet surprising outcome.

This story shines a very bright light on a very real problem and it makes no apologies about the telling of it....It is *so* casual in its delivery of the cold hard details, it gave me chills...it reads like someone's true confession.

I found it quite hard to put down during the second half, not because it was so good..as good is not a term that comes to mind when describing this story...rather because it was so compelling in its depiction of the story as its pieces came uncomfortably together.

Even the aforementioned sex scenes...though still overly graphic....gained some context.

This book was so compelling it made me squirm...weeks after reading it I am still at a loss for adequate words to describe the intensity of its delivery, and the profound effect it had on me.

For all of it's disquieting and discomforting delivery, it is a remarkable book...especially for a debut novel!

Anna George is a new Aussie author to look out for! This is not a book I would normally choose, but having read it, I will definitely look out for more from this author.

4.5★s

Kimbofo says

‘My name is David James Forrester. I’m a solicitor. Tonight, at 6.10, I killed my wife. This is my statement.’

So begins Anna George’s debut novel, *What Became Before*, a dark and disturbing look at a marriage that goes completely off the rails set in Melbourne’s inner-west.

The book charts the two-year relationship between Elle Nolan, a former lawyer turned successful film maker, who is independent and lives alone, and David Forrester, a solicitor caught in a well-paying job that he hates.

When they meet Elle is in her mid-30s, David is 42. Both are at different points in their lives and careers, and seem almost complete opposites, but there’s a spark there that both recognise and flame into something stronger.

When they initially get together the sex is electric, so much so that Elle shelves her original idea that their union was to be a simple one-night stand. Before she knows it, David has practically moved in to her home in Seddon, a Western suburb that he hates and she loves, and spend every spare moment together. Happiness forever after beckons.

But, as one would expect from a novel that starts out with such a dark and intriguing opening line, things start to go a bit awry. When Elle first notices David’s tendency to be immature and spiteful, she dismisses it, thinking she can change him. But when that behaviour escalates to violence, she breaks it off with him.

Yet David is a tenacious man — and won't let her go. Over the course of two years, the pair have more break-ups than you can poke a stick at, but they always end up back together again — until that one crucial night when David attacks her in the kitchen and ends her life.

To read the rest of my review, please visit my blog.

Shelleyrae at Book'd Out says

"My name is David James Forrester. I'm a solicitor. Tonight, at 6.10, I killed my wife. This is my statement."

In her remarkable debut novel, Anna George begins with the end in order to explore what came before. As David Forrester sits slumped in his car, and Elle Nolan floats over her broken body, George takes us back to the beginning of their relationship, witness first to the heady rush of attraction and then the slow, painful corruption of love.

With keen insight and deft characterisation, George exposes the dynamic of domestic violence from the perspective of both abuser and victim.

David frames love in terms of power and control. His rare concessions are manipulative, his few apologies calculated, his affection conditional.

"You cannot kill your wife because you have lost control of her."

Elle frames love in terms of surrender, gradually conceding her wants and needs to David, desperate to recapture the limerence of their initial connection.

"If only she had held onto herself"

But of all the truths in narrative it is this that resonates the strongest with me...

"Looking back she wonders at his mastery. He'd said so little yet she had heard so much."

What Came Before is a finely crafted, provocative novel told with a powerful intensity.

"It's only once the damage has been done that anyone bothers about what came before."

Jocelyn (foxonbooks) says

Oof. This was a hard read. Following the spiral of a gradually abusive relationship, What Came Before

challenges us to look at what we expect, and what we'll accept from those we love. Ambitious and confronting, it's not for everyone, but is a particularly powerful novel. Three and a half stars.

Jason says

Wow, what a novel. If beautifully written psychological thrillers are your thing you can't go past Anna George's debut.

Cate says

Utterly preposterous. Overworked, overwritten, poorly formatted in the kindle edition, full of cliche, not sure what genre it wants to be, scattered. Just 1000 kinds of awful.

Jacki (Julia Flyte) says

This is the story of a dysfunctional, abusive relationship which opens with the statement: "My name is David James Forrester. I'm a solicitor. Tonight, at 6.10, I killed my wife." The story then moves in two directions simultaneously: exploring the story of how David and his wife Elle met and how their relationship evolved and at the same time moving forwards on the night of the crime as David deals with the ramifications of what he has done.

This is a well written, book but I have to say that I really disliked it. David is such an unpleasant character and the details of their relationship are not easy to read. I didn't like spending time with these people and seeing the chances that Elle kept giving this man, knowing what we were leading towards. There are also some graphic sex scenes which felt quite uncomfortable to read.

I also felt that the structure of the book let it down. I didn't feel any tension because I knew what was going to happen (there is a slight twist towards the end, but it's insufficient).

I will say that the characters are very rounded and feel real - as I've said above, the book is well written - but I did not enjoy it and I wouldn't recommend it.
