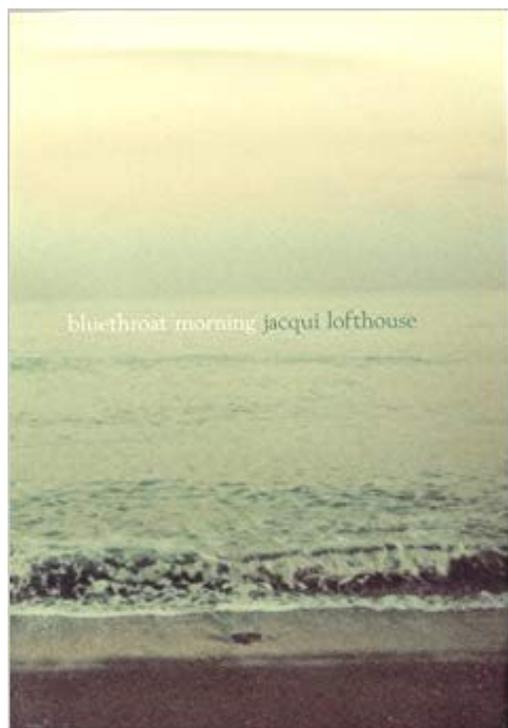


Bluethroat Morning *by* Jacqui Lofthouse



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Alison Bliss, world-famous model and author of the critically acclaimed *Sweet Susan*, walks into the sea on a 'bluethroat morning'. She becomes a greater icon in death than in life and the Norfolk village of Glaven, where she spent her final days, is soon a place of pilgrimage. Six years later her husband Harry, a schoolteacher, is still haunted by her suicide and faithful to her memory. Then he meets nineteen-year-old Helen and they begin an intense affair. But their liaison is darkened by the past. Harry is attracted by Helen's uncanny resemblance to Arabella - his ancestor's second wife - whose story inspired Alison's final work. Not much was known about Arabella, except that she had drowned herself in the sea at Glaven, her hometown. Fascinated by her photograph, Alison had travelled to the Norfolk village only mysteriously to follow in Arabella's tragic footsteps. Propelled by their affair, Harry returns with Helen to the scene of his wife's death, determined finally to make his peace. There they meet ninety-eight-year-old Ern Higham who holds the key to both Arabella and Alison's stories. With the media circling, Harry discovers a tale that has been generations in the making and at whose centre may lie the reason for Alison's suicide. As he pieces together the past and confronts his own pain, Harry discovers that he must relive history truly to understand it.



Reviews of the **Bluethroat Morning** by Jacqui Lofthouse

Tam

I have to admit that the first few chapters of this book had me wondering whether to continue or give up. I came to the conclusion that this extremely descriptive and well written novel has to be read at a leisurely pace to absorb the intricate details of the storyline. A fascinating and haunting mystery. Thanks to TBC Reviewer Group for giving me the opportunity to read this book.

Jogrnd

Jacqui Lofthouse, *Bluethroat Morning* (Bloomsbury, 2001)

Jacqui Lofthouse's second novel has faded into obscurity at an amazing rate (Amazon will still let you add it to your cart, but when it comes to actually shipping the thing...). This is truly a travesty of justice, for *Bluethroat Morning* is the best literary mystery I've read in a very long time.

Harry Bliss' wife, Alison, committed suicide six years ago by the rather odd method of stripping, walking into the ocean, and drowning. It takes a lot to drown yourself while not weighted down. (Try it sometime.) His life since has been almost cloistered, nothing but work and sleep. Until, that is, he meets his best friend's daughter, a nineteen-year-old who happens to bear a striking resemblance to Harry's grandfather's second wife, about whom Alison's second novel was going to be about before she killed herself in the middle of writing it. Helen, the daughter, is vicariously attracted to Harry through being one of Alison's legion of fans; it's almost inevitable the two of them begin a torrid affair. This is the lynchpin that drives Harry to the understanding that he must find out what happened in the two weeks before Alison's death, while she was on working holiday at the resort town of Glaven, in order to get on with his own life.

Bluethroat Morning is plotted with such an intricacy that the reader will start seeing symbolism in every word (how much of it is red herring I will leave to you to discover) and start reading ominous gestures into every action taken by every character, major or minor. The subplots and various threads of the mystery are skillfully woven, with nothing left unresolved at any point and every character eventually finding a use, even the red herrings. All this combines with Lofthouse's easy economy with words and direct approach to the subject matter to create a book both complex and readable, not an easy thing to find. Hovers a little on the "tell" side of "show, don't tell" now and again, but that's the book's only flaw (and it is a minor one; never more than a few toes over the line). Absolutely astonishing, and highly recommended. A candidate for the year's ten best reads list.

Jerinovir

The book is about a model, Alison, who struggles with anorexia, then becomes a successful author when she writes a semi-autobiographical book about the fashion industry. She finds an old photograph in her husband's house of one of his ancestors with his wife and becomes intrigued with the unhappy-looking woman in the photo. She finds out that the woman in the picture committed suicide by walking into the sea and goes to the town where it all happened to do research and write her second book about this woman, Arabella. The twist, which you learn very early on in the first chapter (so I'm not giving anything away here), is that Alison ends up committing suicide by doing the exact same thing in the very place that Arabella did it and her husband is left to unravel the mystery of her death.

This was a real page turner and very well written. The plot sucked me in like a Hoover and didn't let go until the very end when it builds to a dramatic conclusion. Wonderful read!!!!

Celace

This was a book that I quite enjoyed reading; and I really liked that there was depth to some of the characters. I voluntarily reviewed an Advance Reader Copy of this book.

Keel

Unfortunately, despite its literary deftness, this psychological suspense/mystery novel is like so many others of its type, i.e., it builds up the reader's expectations to a high pitch, and then peters out at its conclusion, as if the author had simply run out of ideas/interest/time, and decided just to be

done with the thing.

I heartily concur with the previous reviewers regarding Ms. Lofthouse's exceptional writing talent, but it is wasted here. Her plot revolves around the efforts of Harry, the widower of Alison, a famous model who had abandoned the fashion world to become a novelist, to discover the reason(s) for her suicide and to come to terms with it. Complicating Harry's search for answers are Alison's posthumous idealization by the reading public and a relentless media scrutiny, coupled with the fact she went to her death in the same manner and at the same place as did an ancestress of Harry's, who also happened to be the subject of Alison's current novel-in-progress at the time of her death. While I generally feel that the most compelling fictional characters are those who are portrayed as flawed, just like regular folks, Ms. Lofthouse's cast is primarily a self-centered, self-seeking, whining bunch. I am old enough to have witnessed the human wreckage and waste that has been left in the wake of those who lived by the '60's slogan, "If it feels good, do it," and am disappointed to find it alive and well, albeit in a fictional tale. Frankly, by the time I reached the conclusion, I would not have minded if a few more of these people had walked into the ocean so that they could not inflict any more pain those around them.

Lastly, a pet peeve -- I find it extremely irritating when a writer with an exceptional command of language resorts to using male locker room vocabulary to refer to male and female anatomy, sexual activity, etc., especially when it occurs in a third-person narrative format, as it does in this case. Judging by her novel as a whole, Ms. Lofthouse can certainly do better than that.

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