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Iris Johansen

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If fate suddenly made you more beautiful than you ever dreamed possible, would it be the beginning of a fairy tale, or your worst nightmare?

The brutal attack should have killed anybody, but Nell Calder did more than survive. She emerged a woman transformed, with an exquisite beauty found only in fairy tales. Nell Calder deserved a happy ending. Instead, her descent into terror has just begun.

Her attacker is still on the hunt, determined to finish what he's started. And Nell, protected by a new face, is just as determined to fight back and take her revenge. But to catch her prey, she will have to expose herself—even if it makes her a killer's prime target.

The Ugly Duckling Details

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Author : Iris Johansen

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From Reader Review The Ugly Duckling for online ebook

Rachelle says

The book held my interest throughout, I think partly I thought the writing style flowed well and partly because I wanted to find out why Nell was a target. I found some parts annoying and unnecessary, for instance, the training camp. I thought the way these multiple men wanted to rape her was treated kind of lightly. She actually went hiking in a swamp with them the day after the attempted rape incident, like it was no big deal. Also I didn't really understand the point of Peter being in the story. And am I the only one who thinks Tania and Michaela seemed to be almost the same person, taken from the same mold? I also thought the whole scene in the auditorium with the sword and the virus was just ridiculous and beyond belief. This was my first Johansen book and I will probably try another book by her.

Mollysusie says

Dumb dumb dumb dumb dumb dumb dumb.

Dumb. And poorly written. No character development, description, imagery. Also medically ridiculous in every way imaginable.

I was so angry I was stuck with only this book. And that I chose to read it instead of just throwing it away and staring at the wall.

Alex is The Romance Fox says

The Ugly Duckling is a story of how a woman survives after being betrayed and then goes on a road to revenge the killing of her little daughter.

Synopsis: If fate suddenly made you more beautiful than you ever dreamed possible, would it be the beginning of a fairy tale, or your worst nightmare?

The brutal attack should have killed anybody, but Nell Calder did more than survive. She emerged a woman transformed, with an exquisite beauty found only in fairy tales. Nell Calder deserved a happy ending.

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Nell Calder is a plain, ordinary woman, whose life is shattered when her husband and small daughter are murdered. She survives the attack but requires a facial reconstruction due to her terrible injuries.

Now with a new beautiful face, she transforms herself from the submissive wife she had been to a strong and determined new person bent on bringing down the people who had so cruelly and brutally murdered her daughter.

Nicholas Tanek, who she first met on the fateful night of the murders, is determined to help her in getting better and stronger. He's a sensual and good-looking alpha-male, with a secret past and a gentle heart inside which he tries to hide from the world. I liked this guy a lot. Mysterious

I liked the two of them together and throughout the story I wanted them to find each other and be happy together...after each having such a sad and unhappy life before.

There was a really nice touch with one of the secondary characters that Nell meets at a training camp...Peter Drake. Heartbreaking but uplifting in the end.

This author's writing style is really great...fast paced plot and good character development.

This is a fantastic romance filled with suspense, sensuality, thrills and twists and turns. The story pulled me in and just kept turning the pages, wanting to find out ..what next!!!

And the ending...loved itit surprise me in a very happy way!!!!!!

Carolyn Bunkley says

This is one of the worst books I ever read. I stuck with it to the end, though, because it was a best-seller and reviewed well, so I had to try to find out why. I then passed it to a friend without telling her my opinion of it, telling her we'd discuss it after she finished; she then tortured her sister the same way.

We were never able to figure out if Johanssen was writing tongue-in-cheek, or if she were trying to write seriously. She stumbled back and forth across the line so many times it was impossible to decide! I've picked up a few more of her works and flipped through them, and the writing seems so similar that I just put them back on the shelf.

The heroine is seriously disfigured, so a plastic surgeon gives her a beautiful face -- with a Roman nose. Really? Then there is the continued reference to how fat she is -- a "hideous size 12." With all the concern about eating disorders, to consider a size 12 "hideous" is just wrong!

The plot is preposterous, the phonetic spelling of the accents of one of the characters hilarious, and to top it off, not one of the characters is really likeable in any way.

Just goes to prove that a book doesn't have to be good to sell well.

I said I would recommend it to "nobody," but it might be a good cautionary "how-not-to" example for a fledgling writer. Awful, simply awful.

Pat Cromwell says

Iris Johansen is another of my favorites. The only problem I've ever had with anything she writes -- this book in particular -- is I don't get the chemistry between the hero and heroine. But that's just me. The romance aside, this is an excellent book with an excellent and surprising reveal. The surprise ending's makes

Romantic Suspense good or bad IMO, and this one is really good. Didn't see it coming.

Betsy says

I found the book somewhat slow as well as unrealistic. Characters were not relatable. Writing style was good though. Not my favorite book by the author. 3 stars

Teena says

This book was a fun read. The story was interesting and the main characters were extremely likable. Iris Johansen did a great job telling the story without bogging me down with useless details and unnecessary information. I really like her writing style. Will definitely read more of her books.

Erin says

I've read this book so many times...it was one of my first revenge books...and this time around, it just wasn't what I wanted it to be. Nell really wasn't the strong, vengeful woman that I remembered her being...despite all of her words to the contrary, she relied completely on Tanek for her revenge. So disappointed!

joyce lynn says

not one of the best of her's that i've read so far, but certainly WELL worth reading! very gripping "tale"!!

i must admit, tho, i'm beginning to wonder if the woman (Iris Johansen) has had some unpleasant dealings w/ the CIA or something in her life?! except for 2 of the books of her's i've read, she's involved some governmentally abc'd agency, if not more, in her plots, and they've not all been "clean" characters that are SUPPOSED to be protecting us and are SUPPOSEDLY setting good examples for us AND are "above reproach", like we'd hoped those "powers that be" would be!!!

of course, in the other 2 books i read, the only reason it wasn't dirty CIA agencies was because of the time period. THOSE books still had dirty "government" officials, they were "just" kings and such.

as i've been unfortunately finding more and more, progress is only truly "supposed" and it is NOT all it's cracked up to be. i think in WAY too many ways, we've actually backslide NOT moved forward. 8^(

anyway ...

i'll climb off my soap box, for now, and say again that this book, and this author, is a GREAT one if you love mystery, intrigue, twists and turns, and don't mind a little romance tossed in. especially if you like gripping

the arm of your reading chair most of the time!

happy readin'!!! i'm off to play w/ laundry, do other chores, and TRY and figure out which book in my pile i'm going to dive into next.

oh, SO many books, SOO many authors, 8^) and SO SO SSOOO little time!!! 8^(

Jenny says

This book shouldn't have taken me almost a week to finish - but I just couldn't get into these characters. One thing that Johansen seems to fall prey to in her books is too many characters. Some of them don't even have page-time, so it's a challenge to me to keep all these people straight; I was constantly flipping back to see who the person was. (And they all have weird names that I think Johansen makes up. C'mon, Rivil? Pardeau? Tanek? Kabler? I'm pretty sure she just chooses letters at random and arranges them to make a word!)

I liked Nicholas, but I wasn't really a fan of the main character, Nell. She was way too one-dimensional. I also didn't buy that she so quickly became so smart and confident. She was kind of an idiot, too - did she really believe that her husband wasn't paid off to marry her? DUMB.

Emily says

When Nell Calder witnesses the death of her daughter, she wishes only to die with her, but Nicholas Tanek who was there to protect her won't let it happen. Nell has spent her whole life as a plain jane living behind a frumpy facade. Nell gets a new lease on life getting a complete transformation along the way, the only goal in her sights is revenge on the man who destroyed her family.

One of my favorite books. Nell is determined to not let anything stand in her way. A roller coaster ride of a story.

Dorie says

....typical....unoriginal.sounded good but too predictable.....I like her writing style though and will read others.

fleurette says

This is a really strange book that reminds me of some of Linda Howard's books. Iris Johansen, on the other hand, also sometimes has tendencies towards similar novels.

The main characters, Nell and Tanek are all right. I like him a little more than her. But neither of them is a hero that I will remember for years. Tanek is probably created a little in the likeness of Roarke from the Nora Roberts series, but he lacks a bit. In general, Tanek seems to be unrealistic. Nell is an interesting character

who undergoes a significant change. However, I find it hard to believe in love between them, friendship and deep respect is credible but love ... not really.

The plot of this book is really strange, although to some extent typical for Iris Johansen. You can talk about the action here rather than about the criminal intrigue. The whole story resembles a scenario of an action movie, also in the absence of any realities. I think I'd rather watch this book as a movie than read it. The whole story focuses on the mother's revenge for the death of her child. However, I could have read too many books of this type because some solutions are obvious to me (view spoiler).

Nice story, read better ones.

Parvathy says

First off the book did fall short of my expectation though it was an interesting read. I still don't get the need to turn the character beautiful. So you have a plain jane, plus sized heroine who is a doormat. Trampled by her husband, parents and pretty much every one she meets and she takes it in good stride because.....she is not attractive..believable. Then she is targeted by some mysterious gang which ends up killing her husband and daughter whom she really adores and damages her face beyond recognition. A perfect set up for a revenge story. Then you have this hero who also has a scarred past and score to settle going on a guilt trip because he was unable to save the woman and child he just met decides to fly in the world's most renowned plastic surgeon and get the woman's face fixed. So the good doctor gets creative and decides to give our plain Jane a face better than that of Helen of Troy. The hero decides to fake the women's death and give her a new identity to eliminate threats while the Plain Jane turned Helen of Troy wants to do the same but KILL BILL style. Till this I was completely with the author and was pretty sure going to give this one a four star but then as the story progressed I realized there was no particular reason for the face change. What was the author trying to prove. I get it if she used the face to gain information from her former acquaintances or act as a double agent or something but that is not the case. She still goes into hiding, she still needs to train and she still does every thing the way it should be done. The whole time I kept thinking she could have done all this things with her plain self why set up this elaborate plastic surgery ruse if you are not going to use the idea. The writer seems to be saying a pretty face gives more confidence and strength but I think anyone has gone through what she has would become strong irrespective of the face. Which still brings me back to square one. Why the face???It is not as though the villains would recognize her like that..She had more luck blending in as her former self. So there you have it, I have reduced one star for not adequately exploiting the premise but other than that the book is an enjoyable read that should be given a try

Danielle The Book Huntress (Back to the Books) says

This book marks a turning point in Iris Johansen's writing. She doesn't write romance anymore, publishing suspense/mystery books now. Another good romance author bites the dust. I enjoyed this book, but it focused on the suspense a little more than I liked. It was still very good. I liked the heroine's transition from passive to empowered. I especially appreciated the scenes where Nell trains to become a badass so she can get her revenge. I enjoyed the interactions between Nell and Nicholas and wished there was more of that. I really don't like the plain jane stories with the drastic makeup. I prefer when their inner beauty is recognized. But in this case, since she was in a horrible car accident and needed plastic surgery, it was very well integrated into the plot. All in all, a very good read, although it needed a touch more romance.

Linda says

Nell Calder, is a trophy wife and she married Richard Calder an ambitious young executive who is extremely selfish, narcissistic and only thinks of his career. Nell is extremely grateful to him and always feels she needs to do everything to assist him to advance his career as he married her because she became pregnant in college and refused to have an abortion. While they were visiting Medea, Greece at an important business dinner; assailants crash the party and begin to murder the guests. Included in the victims is Nell's 4 year old daughter Jill who is killed despite Nell's efforts to protect her, she is slashed numerous times and Nell is thrown over the balcony. Nicholas Tanek is one of the guests and by profession is a criminal. Nell's daughter and husband are both murdered that night and Tanek seeks to protect Nell and aid her in order to find out why her name was on the hit list that he thought was bogus. Nell is thought dead and Tanek hides her away at his remote ranch, he wants to protect her and unravel the mystery why she was on the hit list. Once Nell recovers she wants to aid Nicholas in avenging her daughter and getting those killers. I like seeing Nell transform herself from a polite, shy woman to a strong killing machine in order to avenge her daughter's death.

Nicole says

Iris Johansen has created and romance, mystery, and thriller all combined into one work of art. The story plot is amazing the way she plans out everything to be revealed just at the right moment.

Nell Calder tricked herself into believing she loved Richard. So she settled as being a trophy wife. She thought she could not get better. She loved being home with her daughter Jill. Jill was and will always be Nell's life. After Jill and Richard had died, she had no reason to live. Tanek didn't agree.

Plastic surgeon, Jeol Lieber, gave her what every girl wants: the swan at the end of every ugly duckling story. Well, at least on the outside; however, inside, she was empty. Once again Tanek gave her a reason to go on. Nell thrived on this; she became obsessed. Dwelling on it every minute of everyday doing anything she had to to get what she wanted, better yet, needed.

Tanek took Nell under his wing and brought her to his secret place. She knew she had to keep him emotionally distant; yet, she felt the most comfortable with him, maybe even too comfortable. The two of them grew closer as Nell learned they both had been dwelling on the same issue.

I would recommend this book to anyone who's looking for something that will make you want to never set the book down. This is the first of Iris Johansen books that I've read and I think there will be more in my future.

Jessica says

First Johansen novel I ever read, and I was hooked. I think this was the first time I'd read a novel solely about a woman making it on her own, and I found I liked it.

Nell suffered a great deal before her transformation, but I loved her determination to exact revenge on those who started the suffering. She wasn't about to be bullied, and she was going to use her new face and figure to her advantage, come Hell or high water.

That she didn't need to put herself in mortal danger was never a consideration for her. That she had no idea

how to track down the people she was looking for, or how to go about getting the revenge she so desperately needed wasn't even a consideration. Her sole focus was the end result, and she knew she'd get there somehow.

Part Rambo, part femme fatale, Nell emerged from under the knife and the hospital visit as someone she didn't even know, and didn't stop to reflect or figure herself out until she had accomplished her goal.

Cheri says

This was much better than I thought it would be. I didn't figure out the mystery til it was solved!

Lynda Kelly says

This is very suspense-filled and fast-paced and certainly held my attention throughout. I really liked it. The cover is a lovely one and when I bought it it was only 49p so I'm dead chuffed !! I had heard of this author but I've not read anything by her before. I looked her up and it seems she was more of a romance-only writer in the past or fantasy stuff. However, the Eve Duncan series sounds just my type of story so I've marked those to try out as well.

I love a story where someone's out for revenge as our heroine in this story is. You're just pulling for them all the way !! Nell was a nice person too, a lovely lady dealt a really miserable hand. Actually, all the people she met along her journey that helped her were all smashing characters. A special favourite for me was Peter. There were a few shocking, unexpected moments and towards the end I was sick with nerves for them at one point....couldn't stop reading then, that's for sure !!

I did find Jill's vocabulary a bit too advanced for a 4 year old and there were a few apostrophe mistakes and the odd passage that could benefit from a comma. Then a couple of instances that made me gasp, since they'd not been picked up. Rint used instead of print, Thompson's and not Thomson's, waiver and not waver....

I vacillated between 5* then 4* (due to those mistakes that were overlooked) and decided in the end to revert to the 5* as it did really keep me entertained the whole way through.
