

Beautiful Malice by Rebecca James

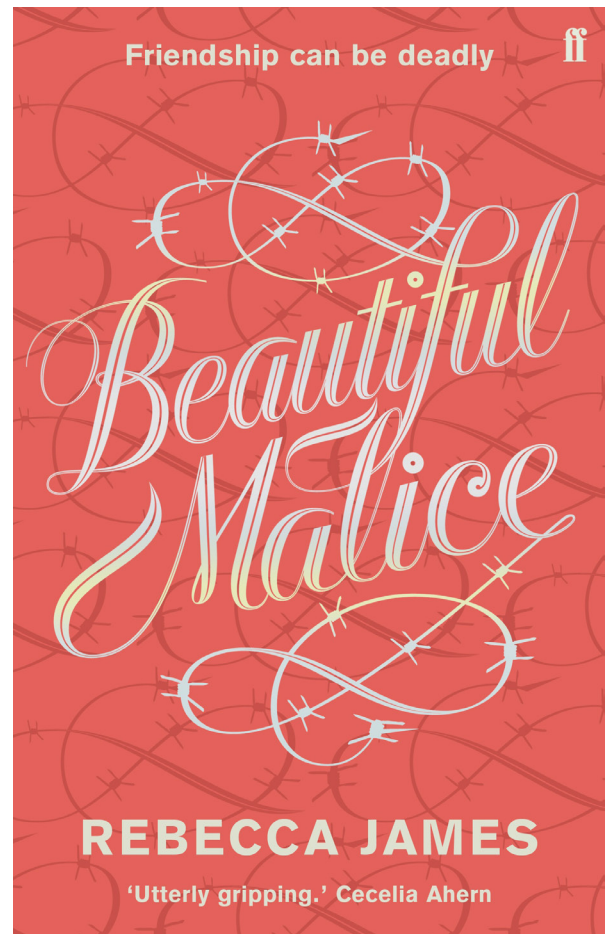
Beautiful Malice by Rebecca James In brief

Friendship can be deadly...

Beautiful Malice is a psychological thriller for young adults and older readers. It is the story of Katherine Patterson. Told in three separate narrative arcs, it begins with Katherine narrating from the present day, when she has a young daughter and is remembering her school friend Alice Parrie.

The bulk of the novel recounts her friendship with Alice during their final few months at school. Intercut with this story are scenes flashing back to a few years ago, when Katherine was known as Katie Boydell. Slowly we learn about her sister Rachel, the horrific ordeal that the pair of them was subjected to and the reason that Katherine is trying to keep her identity a secret.

But just as Katherine believes she has found a friend she can trust, she realises that Alice too is not all that she seems. But is it too late to back out of this new friendship?





Background

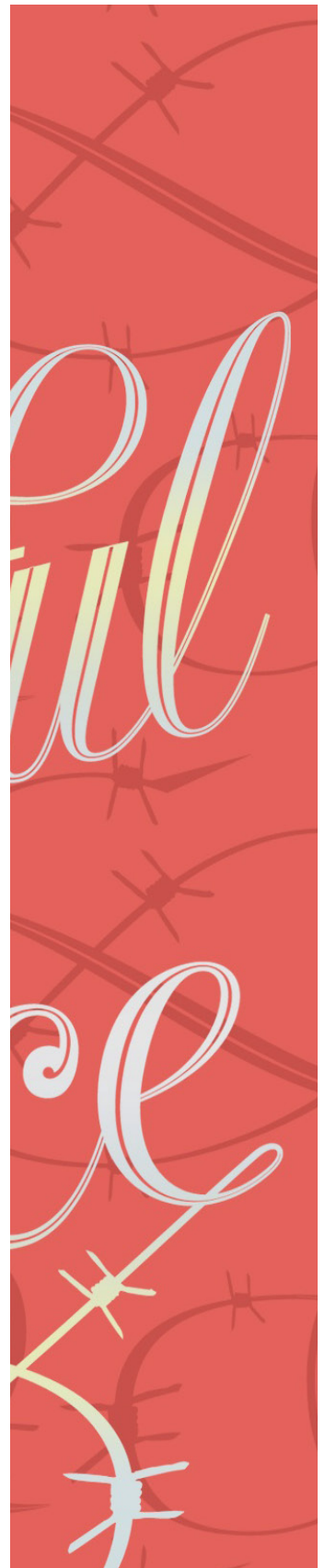
Rebecca James is an Australian author who had written one book for online publication prior to finishing her manuscript for *Beautiful Malice*. Seven literary agents in her home country rejected the novel before it was taken on by UK based Conville & Walsh. Before long, the novel became an international publishing sensation: it will now be published in thirty-five different territories, including Australia and the United States.

The novel has been published in a variety of ways internationally, some marketing it at a teen audience – the *Wall Street Journal* referred to her as the new JK Rowling – and others recognising the fact that as a thriller it also makes a gripping adult read.

Following hot on the heels of wizards, vampires and angels, it is rooted very much in the world of modern teenage preoccupations and issues, which makes it a refreshingly realistic read. Rebecca James is now working on her third novel, *Cooper Bartholemew is Dead*.

For discussion

- What did you think of the way that the book was structured? Did you enjoy the use of flashbacks? Do you think that they increased the tension in an effective way?
- Beautiful Malice has become an international publishing sensation. Did this make you want to read the book more? Do you think it affected the way that you approached reading it? Or did this not matter to you?
- How do you think Rebecca James managed to make Alice such a chilling character? Are there any particular scenes that stuck out for you?
- Do you think that Alice is also an empathetic character though? Do you think Rebecca James has done a good job making the reader understand why she acts the way she does?
- Katherine puts up with Alice and her behaviour for a long time. Do you think that Rebecca James makes this credible?
- How does the novel deal with the subject of grief? Did you find you could identify with Katherine's grief, even if you had not suffered an ordeal like hers? Or did the situation seem too unreal or extreme?
- How did you enjoy the family scenes in the book? Have you experienced the kind of sibling rivalry that Rebecca James describes between Katherine and Philippa?
- Did you believe in the romances that Katherine has in the book? Did you think that the romance plotlines were necessary? Which of the boys would you have preferred Katherine to end up with?
- Did you enjoy the novel because it had gripping characters, or because the plot was a real page-turner? Or was it a combination of the two?
- Did you guess the reason that Katherine had been trying to keep her past as Katie Boydell a secret? Once you had found out, did you consider it a credible reason for her anxieties?
- Did you guess the twist at the end of the novel? If you did, did you find that that made the story a better one or not?
- Have you imagined what the characters might be doing now? Do you enjoy thinking beyond the end of the book, or do you only like to hear the author's version, up until the official ending?
- Would you like to see a film of Beautiful Malice? If so, are there any particular actors you would like to see play the lead characters?



About the author

Rebecca James was born in Sydney in 1970. She grew up in numerous different places throughout Australia – including Bourke, Sydney, Wellington and Bathurst.

She has worked as a waitress, an English teacher in Indonesia and Japan, a barmaid, and (most memorably) a minicab telephone operator in London.

She has started several university degrees and despite never having finished any, she has finished two books. She received news of her book deal for *Beautiful Malice* the day after she and her partner had decided to close the family kitchen design business on account of the global recession.

She lives in Armindale, Australia with her partner, their four sons and two dogs.



Resources



<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125625947789002885.html>

Wall Street Journal article about Rebecca James

<http://www.thebookseller.com/in-depth/trade-profiles/116005-aussie-rules.html>

Bookseller interview with Rebecca James

<http://daisychainbookreviews.blogspot.com/2010/05/author-interview-rebecca-james.html>

Daisy Chain blogger interview with Rebecca James

<http://rebeccasjames.blogspot.com/>

Rebecca James's blog

Suggested further reading

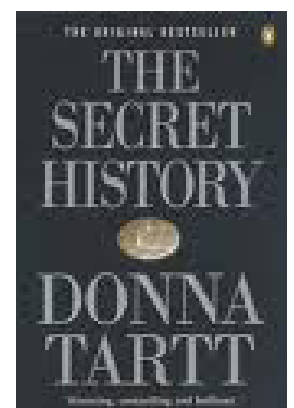
The Lovely Bones by Alice Sebold

The Poison Tree by Erin Kelly

The Secret History by Donna Tartt

The House at Midnight by Lucie Whitehouse

We Need to Talk about Kevin by Lionel Shriver



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Rebecca James Q&A

Where did you begin writing? With the plot, or with the characters?

Hmmm, when I start thinking about character and plot and where one begins and the other ends I start getting very confused. I feel like they overlap quite a bit...certainly in a book like Beautiful Malice where the plot often moves along through dialogue - which could be described as either character or plot. I suppose I would have to say that I wanted to write about a toxic friendship, and the way I wanted to do it, required both character and plot from the beginning.

Are any of the characters based on people or relationships you had in real life?

Not really. I have certainly had a few uncomfortable friendships in my life - although I've never been friends with anyone quite as scary as Alice - and those experiences certainly influenced my desire to write about it. What I do find very interesting is that as you get older you become much less tolerant of unhappy relationships, much better at picking people who are likely to cause drama and angst in your life and therefore much better at avoiding it.

Had you dreamed of writing this story for a long time or did it come to you quite suddenly?

I don't remember really...I guess it must have come to me quite suddenly. I certainly don't remember thinking about it a long time before I started writing. Usually if I have a good idea I start writing about it immediately - unlike some authors I find good plots hard to come up with!

Did you have a character that you enjoyed writing the most?

I enjoyed writing about Alice the most. It's always fun writing about extreme people.

Can you imagine writing a sequel?

Hmmm... somehow I just don't think it would work. Alice is dead, remember? (This is not a spoiler, the first line of the book mentions her funeral). It would seem very B-grade movie to bring her back to life now. But, then again, if someone could come up with a convincing way to do it I'd be happy to give it a go.

How did you find a way to make each of the characters empathetic?

I think if you show that the characters have a few normal human vulnerabilities the readers can usually empathise with them. Even Alice, wicked as she is, has some redeeming qualities. I hope readers don't hate her too much!

Now that you have been published, are you finding it easier or more difficult to write your second?

More difficult, definitely. I think it's a combination of fear (people have expectations now!) and being quite preoccupied with the release and promotion of Beautiful Malice. Having said that, I have almost finished the first draft of my second book, Cooper Bartholomew is Dead - another psychological thriller.

Would you like to see Beautiful Malice adapted for film or television?

Of course, it would be a great thrill!