

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
CONFESSIONS ON THE 7:45

LISA UNGER

LAST

GIRL

GHOSTED

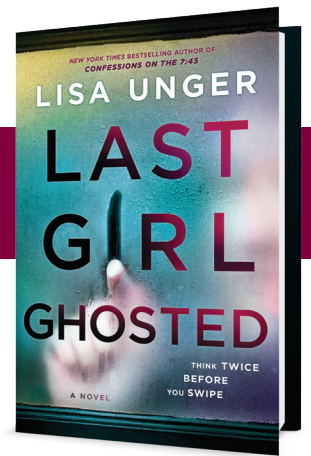


A NOVEL

THINK TWICE
BEFORE
YOU SWIPE

Behind the Book

LOVE IS NOT AN ALGORITHM by Lisa Unger



There's always a seed for every novel, a moment, or point of obsession that leads me to research. For ***Last Girl Ghosted***, it was a conversation with a young friend about online dating. We were talking about some of the current apps out there—apps for dating, as well as just for hooking up. And she said something that stayed with me. She said that there was this endless pool of choices, that you could just keep swiping and there was the next person and then the next. How could you ever know, she wondered, if you'd picked the right one? And then, if the person you picked turned out to be less than what you imagined from your online encounter, then it was just too easy to ghost that person and move on. You had no tie to that stranger before or after.

I've been married for twenty-one years, so when I was younger, online dating services had just begun. And I met a few men online, each encounter more disappointing than the last. But I have good friends, including my pal *New York Times* bestselling author Alafair Burke, who met her wonderful husband, Sean, online. (She talks about this often, so I'm not giving away any secrets!) They have been happily married for more than fifteen years. So obviously, you can find love anywhere if that's what you're seeking.

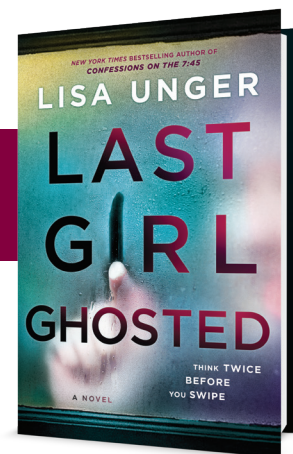
Likewise, you can find a victim, or a casual hookup, or even just a random sexual partner to meet you in a public bathroom somewhere. The internet and dating apps have taken what used to be a relatively small pool of people—your town, your church, your workplace, the local bars and clubs—with a relatively small set of expectations, and expanded it exponentially. The upside: endless choices. The downside: no close connections, no external reason to treat each other well. You're not going to wind up in church on Sunday sitting next to your Tinder date's grandmother. So, go ahead and ghost her.

I spent a couple weeks researching the modern world of online dating and all the ways in which we have turned over our search for love to computers that try to use our data to predict who we might find attractive, apps that share our location with other people looking to connect, and all the ways in which choice and loose connections make it easy to discard and move on, often with just a chain of vague texts—*can't make it tonight, sorry I missed you, or maybe next week*. And then nothing.

But these thoughts about online dating were just the germ. Of course ***Last Girl Ghosted*** is about much more than that.

Behind the Book

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I started hearing the voice of Wren Greenwood, an advice columnist with an ugly past. I knew she was someone who'd worked hard to break away from violence and darkness. When I first met her, she'd constructed a life—a thriving career, a townhome she was restoring in Brooklyn, a family of friends, people she'd chosen, including her closest pal Jax. And it's Jax who worries that Wren works too hard, never has any fun, and finally pushes reluctant Wren into online dating.

After a couple of pleasant but ultimately short-lived hookups, Wren meets Adam. And even though she wasn't looking for love, she falls hard. It's fast and intense and before she knows it, she's in deep.

Adam, a cybersecurity expert, and Wren spend a whirlwind three months in love, sharing a passion for Rilke, New York City and great food. The sex is white-hot.

Then, at the end of a romantic evening, Adam has a request. "Tell me something about yourself that you've never told anyone," he says. And she does. She shares with Adam the dark and violent past she has tried to escape. She bares all. Because that's what we do in love, right? We reveal ourselves and hope we're enough.

The next day, Adam stands her up. She can't reach him. As the night winds on, it becomes clear. Wren has been ghosted. Wren knows all too well about the sweetheart scam—in her work as Dear Birdie, the advice columnist, she hears from the broken-hearted all the time. But nothing has been taken from her—except her heart, except her self-esteem, her hope that love exists in a world that's not always kind. That's all.

When private detective Bailey Kirk shows up at her door, looking for the man she knew as Adam, it becomes clear that the man she thought she loved is someone else altogether. And that in his wake, there's a string of girls—girls who also thought they were in love. Girls who had disappeared, never to be heard from again. Some people might curl up and lick their wounds, wait for that broken heart to heal and move on.

But not Wren. She's a fighter. And when a piece of the puzzle that is Adam leads her back to the town where she grew up—The Hollows—Wren decides that she is going to follow his dark digital trail, even if it means facing down her own demons, too. She decides that she's going to be the last girl ghosted.

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A couple of things:

Last Girl Ghosted is not a Hollows book—though part of it is set in my fictional town. And fans of *The Hollows* might be happy to spend a little time with Jones Cooper, who plays a role in the story. It wasn't planned as I started hearing Wren's voice and followed her story. It's just where we wound up, and I didn't seek to change directions. But for anyone who has not read *The Hollows* books, this story stands completely alone. (Though long-time readers will recognize a few things!)

If you do the math, you might figure out that I wrote this book during the pandemic. It is *not* a pandemic book. But re-reading it now, I see how the world and all its chaos affected my writing. There's an impending sense of doom, something Wren carries with her from her father, a brutally abusive doomsday prepper who thought the world was about to end. There's the shadow of something terrible coming.

I didn't think the events of the day had found their way into my work, but of course they did.

It's only now, as I start writing about the book, talking about it, that I see finally what it truly is at its heart. ***Last Girl Ghosted*** is about online dating, and all the new ways we love and hurt each other. It's about being drawn to the darkness you see in someone, because when you come from abuse that's what you think love is. It's about breaking with the legacy of our family of origin to create a life we choose when we know better. It's about fighting, about doing the right thing even when it destroys us. And ultimately it's about love. Painful, messy, complicated, wonderful, beautiful, unpredictable love that defies algorithms, and binds us together, even though the chaotic modern world seeks to tear us apart.

I hope you love it! Happy reading.

Discussion Guide

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



Warning: Spoilers

Many people have successfully found love through online dating, but there are also a lot of horror stories—people who were ghosted or even worse. Do you know anyone who has done online dating? What was their experience?

Wren Greenwood is, in her professional life, an advice columnist called Dear Birdie. Because she's come from a traumatic and abusive past, suffered great losses, she feels that she can show people the way through the darkest moments of their lives. Have you ever reached out to an advice columnist?

When Wren realizes that Adam is not who she believed him to be, she doesn't just curl up, lick her wounds and try to move on. She decides to follow his very dark digital trail into a past she's been trying to escape. What are some reasons she might have done that?

What role does technology—social media, dating apps, cell phones, etc.—play in the story? How does it fail the characters? How does it help?

Wren has two very close friends, Robin and Jax. They are both very different but important to Wren in unique ways. Discuss Robin and Jax, what they each mean to Wren. How are they different from each other? What do they have in common?

Wren's father defines himself as a "collapsist," meaning that he thinks the world has come to an end already and humanity just hasn't noticed yet. In other words, he's a doomsday prepper. What do you think of his opinions about the world?

Wren's father teaches her how to hunt. How did you react to the scene where she kills the deer? What did you learn about Wren? About her father? And how does this scene color other elements of the story?

When Bailey Kirk first shows up in Wren's life, she's distrusting of him. But as the story progresses, they grow closer. How would you describe their relationship? How did you feel about Bailey and the choices he makes?

Discuss the missing women, all of whom loved a different version of the man Wren knew as Adam. What did they each have in common? What made them each vulnerable to Adam?

At the end of the novel, Wren concludes: love is the way. What does she mean by this? How does this theme run through the book?