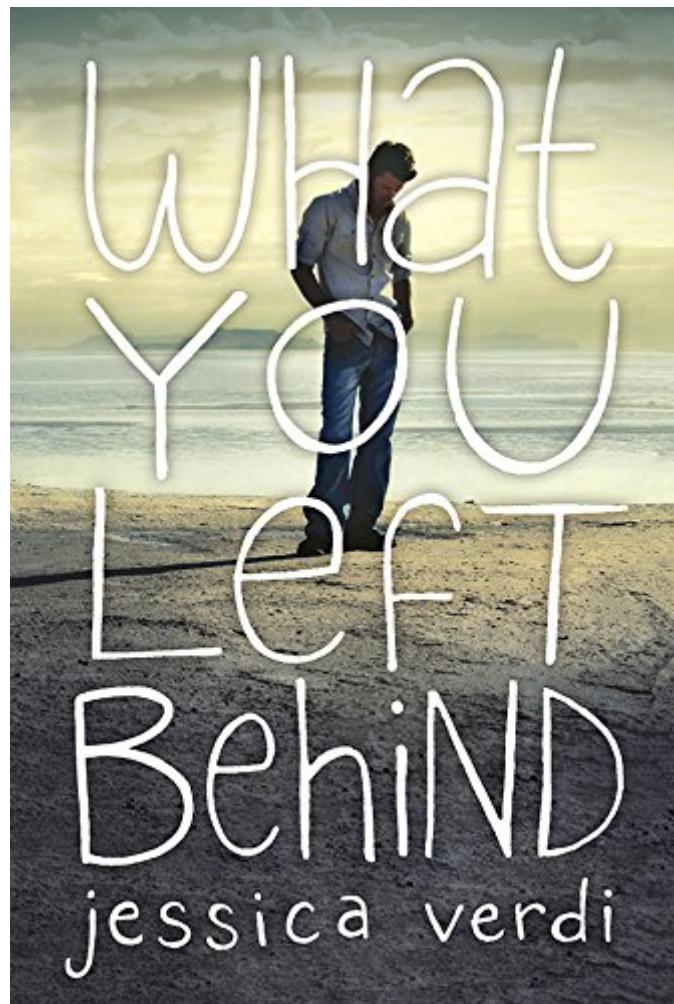


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# What You Left Behind



## **Synopsis**

Jessica Verdi, the author of *My Life After Now* and *The Summer I Wasn't Me*, returns with a heartbreakingly poignant novel of grief and guilt that reads like Nicholas Sparks for teens. It's all Ryden's fault. If he hadn't gotten Meg pregnant, she would have never stopped her chemo treatments and would still be alive. Instead he's failing fatherhood one dirty diaper at a time. And it's not like he's had time to grieve while struggling to care for their infant daughter, start his senior year, and earn the soccer scholarship he needs to go to college. The one person who makes Ryden feel like his old self is Joni. She's fun and energetic—and doesn't know he has a baby. But the more time they spend together, the harder it becomes to keep his two worlds separate. Finding one of Meg's journals only stirs up old emotions. Ryden's convinced Meg left other notebooks for him to find, some message to help his new life make sense. But how is he going to have a future if he can't let go of the past?

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Grade: A-Ryden killed his girlfriend by getting her pregnant, at least that's what he thinks. If she hadn't become pregnant she would have never stopped chemo and she'd still be alive. With senior year and an expected soccer scholarship on the horizon, he needs to find figure out daycare, his job, school and most importantly, soccer. Still grieving, Ryden doesn't expect to fall for his quirky coworker, Joni, but he didn't expect to be a single dad at seventeen either. He also didn't expect juggling everything would be so hard. I didn't expect to love *WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND* as much as I did. Jessica Verdi crafted a complex, believable character in narrator Ryden. He's shortsighted, a bit selfish, unprepared, imperfect and sometimes deceitful, while working his butt off to be a good dad. He doesn't get it, but he tries, sometimes harder than others. He loves baby Hope, but somehow resents her. His mother, who was a single teen mom, is the perfect balance of helpful and hands off while pushing Ryden to take responsibility and not giving him the easy way out by fixing things for him. Verdi's writing feels like the actual voice of a teen young man, thrust into adulthood too soon. The ending also felt authentic. I was expecting a predictable \*\*big event\*\* to teach Ryden that Hope should always be his first priority, but Verdi doesn't take the easy way out. When I finished reading, I wished she had written a sequel. **THEMES:** grief, cancer, teen parenting, school, family, friendship *WHAT YOU LEFT BEHIND* is a moving, realistic story telling the learning curve of teen single fatherhood.

The worst day in Ryden Brooks' life was probably the day his daughter was born. It took so much away from him; yet left him with such a heavy load to carry. He will never see his daughter's mother again, as Meg Reynolds' cancer-ridden body dedicated its remaining strength to giving birth to their daughter Hope. What Meg left behind overshadows Ryden's joy of becoming a father. He will forever live with the guilt of killing Meg by getting her pregnant, and thus forcing her to stop her treatment. He forever live with the guilt of being an inadequate father, as he is struggling to make ends meet while trying to keep up good grades to finally make it into college. But Meg also left behind journals, that Ryden is desperate to find to get some kind of closure. Except instead of closure, all Ryden finds is anger and betrayal. **What I loved about this book:** The depth of the characters, The suspenseful storyline, The heartfelt and tear-threatening emotions, What I felt needed improvement: Nothing! *What You Left Behind* was probably one of the most heartfelt and tear threatening reads that I came across so far in 2015. When I read the plot summary, I knew I had to pre-order this. And gosh, I can't say I was disappointed because this is definitely the kind of read that sticks with you, and that leaves you thinking and wondering way beyond the end of the book. The plot summary definitely sets the tone of the story and the reader knows exactly what to

expect: a teenage-dad who, between changing diapers and managing to get his stuff together for school and college, mourns the loss of his first love and soulmate. What You Left Behind was written entirely from Ryden's POV - so you get the full idea of what is going on in his head. And while this storyline might sound "lame", it totally isn't. Because circumstances make it that Ryden won't let go of the past even though his daughter, his situation, and the connection he makes with Jodi prompt him to look forward instead of back: he is literally trapped in memories of Meg and in his desire to have closure - even if he still holds himself responsible for killing her by getting her pregnant. Yet, Ryden firmly believes that the journals Meg left behind will provide him the closure he needs. And on top of dealing with those feelings - the loss and the guilt - he also battles his inadequacy at being a dad. He is convinced that due to the fact that he never had a father, he will never be a good one himself. In the end, all his frustrations radiate off him, along with his denial of fatherhood, and affect his daughter, who senses his distress. "What if I am literally incapable of being a father to this baby because I have zero concept of what a father really is?" And all that time, Meg remained this untouchable, holy creature you could almost call a martyr. It is a common thing that when a loved one dies, he or she is being but on a pedestal and granted absolution for every faulty thing they might have done before they left. Even though at the beginning, Meg really appears as if she never did anything to harm anyone. But as the story progresses - and the journals reveal more and more - the reader gets a different impression of her. I really started to resent her more and more throughout the book. Not because of what she did (since I could relate to her motives) but the way she did it just left me brokenhearted from Ryden. She relieves him of that feeling of guilt he carries around just to give him that feeling back tenfold, but on another subject. (view spoiler) The whole book and story was absolutely captivating and Ryden's POV and quest for answers made it a complete pageturner. The discovery of the journals, one by one, make for huge and unexpected twists in the story. The writing was so skillfully executed - taking place in the present, yet allowing the journals to act as revealing flashbacks from the past - that I felt engaged at all times: I wanted to know what happened between Ryden and Meg before she died and gave life to their daughter Hope; I wanted to know how Ryden was going to handle taking care of Hope while succeeding at school; I desperately wanted to know if there were any other journals like he expected there to be (and if so, what they would tell him); and... I wanted to know what the deal was with Joni. But thankfully, while this book was sad, it was full of strong characters. I liked every single one of the features characters because they were not your usual protagonists: some were peculiar and some were downright anti-heroes. I loved Alan (Meg's best friend), but also Mable and even Ryden's mom. As for Joni, she is both a side and a main character in this story and she was just perfect. A ray of sunshine in

Ryden's world."How did I not see it from day one? Joni makes everything better. She makes it easy to forget."I simply loved Ryden. He was the perfect main character. He was down to earth, human, vulnerable, and struggling with very realistic issues. He was perfect through all his imperfections. His evolution throughout the book is tremendous, and I was amazed by how easy it was to relate to him through all the sh\*t he's been dealt with, when he really wasn't asking for it.And, what I loved most about What You Left Behind is that it doesn't end in your usual cookie-cutter happy ending, but rather with a morale that engages the reader to reflect further on this book. It's one of those Young Adult books (it might border a little onto New Adult) which manage to rise above their genre and become meaningful stories and life-lessons. In the end, I guess that one phrase sums up the morale of the book quite well:"Just because the whys have changed, doesn't mean the whats have."This basically means that you can always go looking for reasons why, and they might even help you understand how you got where you are now. But chances are you will never be able to get a do-over, and your situation will remain unchanged. And in Ryden's case he will just have to make the best of it because things are what they are.And no matter how angry I was at Meg in the end of the book (and at her frankly appalling and reckless behaviour), I couldn't rate this book any less than 5 full stars, because the way the situation was turned around mattered more than what led to the situation in the first place.I was disappointed not to get an epilogue though, because it would have been interesting to find out how Ryden put things into perspective with the help of the unexpected Joni; how he got his life straight a few years down the road, and if he finally managed to let go of the past in order to move on.But all in all, this read was a captivating masterpiece I would highly recommend you check out. It's like a wonderful reunion of The Fault in Our Stars and a healthy dose of Colleen Hoover, with it's own Jessica Verdi signature style.

I don't read YA as a rule because it tends to deal with emotions I've already figured out in my life. But What You Left Behind is a notch above the expected book about teens.For starters, the writing is excellent. Every writing coach should make this mandatory reading for showing, not telling the story.Second, Verdi understands humans and their emotions. My BFF's daughter had a best friend who died in a car accident less than a month after her 16th birthday. The heartbreak, the anger, the self-doubt, the blame we all went through -- but particularly the high school crowd -- is captured beautifully, rawly, unforgettably here even though the topic is completely different. It's like Verdi earned a childhood psych degree and then used the knowledge but none of the preachy couch babbble to bring this story to life.I just bought a few copies to give as gifts to other YA writers looking to study the best in the genre.

It was a really emotional book. I cried a little bit, I loved what happens towards the end, even though the cliffhanger-y ending felt like a little bit of a letdown to me. I'd definitely recommend this to anyone who loves contemporary romance stories with a deeper, emotional subject matter. I received a review copy in exchange for an honest review.

I found with the first paragraph I was pulled right into the story of Ryden and Meg, wanting to know more... Jessica Verdi has a way of engaging her readers while keeping them engaged throughout. I hated when I needed to put the book down. This by far is one of the best YA books I have read thus far. Thank You Jessica for shining such a bright light on important realistic issues that transpire on a daily basis.

Everything thinks Ryden is going crazy. He is sure that Meg left more journals somewhere but now that she is gone he does not know where else to look. Meg had their baby and then died leaving him to take care of the baby during his senior year of high school. Ryden is up for a soccer scholarship, can he maintain his standing and his grades so he still deserves it? What should he do?

I read this book in a only a few days. If I had the time I could've read it in one day. It is an amazing book and I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in books like this.

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