



Dear Jo

By Christina Kilbourne

Montreal: Lobster Press, 2007

188 pages

\$10.95

★★★★★

Reviewed by Rosemary Renton

I did not intend to read *Dear Jo*, by Christina Kilbourne, in one sitting, but I could not put it down. Written in diary form, it is the story of 12-year-old Maxine LeMay, whose best friend has been abducted by an Internet predator. The plot follows Maxine as she recounts the events that led to the abduction; struggles with worry, fear and guilt about surviving her own close call; grieves when Leah's body is found in the woods; and eventually assists police in capturing the man who killed her friend.

With its shocking opening and short, intense diary entries, this book is easy to read and will be a popular choice with reluctant readers. But it also has a great plot and excellent writing to appeal to a more sophisticated audience.

The characters are believable and sympathetic. Leah and Maxine are good girls who meet a boy online, chat with him for months, and finally agree to meet him in a public place. How the killer manages to trick them will send shivers down your spine when you realize it could happen to anyone who lets down her guard for a moment.

The violence is responsibly handled. Although Leah is murdered, the details of the assault are never made explicit. The author uses Maxine's parents to warn about Internet safety without seeming artificial, and there are Internet safety tips at the back of the book.

Still, this book is upsetting – I cried at the end. But in this age of instant messaging, chat rooms, and Facebook, that's not a bad thing. In fact, if it were up to me, this book would be mandatory reading for every kid with Internet access. Highly recommended.

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