

WHAT IS LEFT OVER AFTER NATASHA LESTER

ABOUT THE BOOK

Gaelle has a dream job working for a fashion magazine, and a husband who loves her. Life should be perfect, but life does not always go according to plan. Feeling lost and alone, Gaelle flees to a tiny seaside town on the other side of the country. As she revisits the legacy of a strange, sometimes magical childhood in France, Gaelle finds unexpected help from a thirteen-year-old stranger.

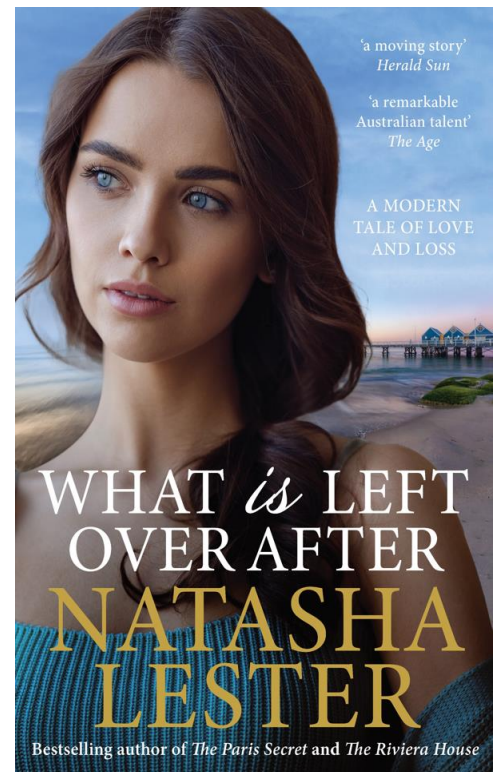
As if she was experiencing her childhood all over again, she must ask: when you lose everything you lose, what is left over after?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Natasha Lester worked as a marketing executive for L'Oreal before turning her hand to writing. She won the 2008 Hungerford Award for her first novel *What is Left Over After* and has since gone on to write several historical fiction novels. When she's not writing, she loves collecting vintage fashion and practising the art of fashion illustration. Natasha lives with her husband and three children in Perth, Western Australia.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Gaelle's mother says 'A wonder tale is often about a clever woman who does not belong because she does not conform' (p.108). In what ways do Gaelle and her mother fail to conform? Is this a choice they make consciously or deliberately?
2. Compare Gaelle's and Selena's personalities: what traits do they have in common and in what ways are they different? Why is this important for their relationship? Given the age difference between them, what is it that enables them to connect?
3. Gaelle often refers to her mother as the 'child-woman'. Why? In your opinion, what is it that demarcates childhood from adulthood? Is Gaelle also a 'child-woman'? In what ways is she different from her mother?
4. What is Miss St Clair's significance for Gaelle as a child in San Francisco?
5. Even as an adult, Gaelle's aesthetic ideas of home – a house with history, worn edges and copper pots – are shaped by her childhood at her grandparents' farm in France, where she has experienced a sense of place. What kind of things from your childhood do you continue to see as beautiful or comforting today?
6. Silence is an important part of many conversations in the novel. What emotions do you think fill the silences between Gaelle and Jason? What thoughts?
7. What kind of place is Siesta Park? How are the people who live there different to those in Gaelle's Sydney? Why is this significant for Gaelle's transformation?
8. In the tale invented by Lili and recounted by Gaelle, the queen gives birth to a girl with a horn, wings and tail that can only be lost when she discovers her humanity. In your opinion, what makes one human? What is the metaphoric relevance of the princess in this novel?
9. What is the significance of the book's title, *What is Left Over After*? What might the 'after' be referring to?
10. Gaelle tells Selena that 'Mothers don't always behave the way they do in stories' (p.100). Do you agree? Why? What kind of expectations do you think are placed on mothers in your community? What happens when mothers depart from these expectations?



11. After her hotel-room meeting with Lucas, Gaelle tells him: 'I got what I want' (p.40). What do you think drives Gaelle to sleep with Lucas and other men?
12. Gaelle fears becoming like her mother. Discuss in which ways she does or does not become like Lili. What do you think Lester might be saying about the nature of inheritance – genetic, emotional, social – and what is it that we pass on?
13. At the novel's conclusion, Gaelle decides to 'find out if there is some truth after all in the fiction of love' (p.285). Given the emphasis on storytelling and fiction in the novel, why do you think that the novel ends at this moment?



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