



Unhooked

By Lisa Maxwell

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From “talented wordsmith” (*Publishers Weekly*) Lisa Maxwell comes a lush, atmospheric fantasy novel filled with twists and turns about a girl who is kidnapped and brought to an island inhabited by fairies, a roguish ship captain, and bloodthirsty beasts.

For as long as she can remember, Gwendolyn Allister has never had a place to call home. Her mother believes they are being hunted by brutal monsters, and those delusions have brought them to London, far from the life Gwen had finally started to build for herself. Gwen’s only saving grace is that her best friend, Olivia, is with her for the summer.

But shortly after their arrival, the girls are kidnapped by shadowy creatures and dragged to a world of flesh-eating sea hags and dangerous Fey. And Gwen begins to realize that maybe her mother isn’t so crazy after all...

Gwen discovers that this new world she inhabits is called Neverland, but it’s nothing like the Neverland you’ve heard about in stories. Here, good and evil lose their meaning and memories slip like water through your fingers. As Gwen struggles to remember where she came from and tries to find a way home, she must choose between trusting the charming fairy-tale hero who says all the right things and the captivating pirate who promises to keep her safe.

Caught in the ultimate battle between good and evil, with time running out and her enemies closing in, Gwen is forced to finally face the truths she’s been hiding from all along. But can she save Neverland without losing herself?

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Editorial Review

Review

“Perfect for fans of A.G. Howard’s Splintered trilogy and ABC’s *Once Upon A Time*, this twisted *Peter Pan* retelling isn’t the Neverland of your dreams—it’s the Neverland of your nightmares.” (Sara Raasch, author of the *Snow Like Ashes* trilogy)

“Lisa Maxwell’s *The Stars Turned Away* spins the classic Peter Pan tale into a tempting, spine-chilling adventure. Maxwell transports readers into the haunting, and yet breathlessly romantic, world of Neverland that will spellbind readers into making them wish they could stay forever.” (Christina Farley, author of the bestselling *Gilded* series)

“This dark, violent, gripping and twisty retelling of Pan is so good, there’s no going back to the original!!” (Ellen Oh, author of the *Prophecy* series)

About the Author

Lisa Maxwell is the author of *The Last Magician*, *Unhooked*, *Sweet Unrest*, and *The Gathering Deep*. She grew up in Akron, Ohio, and has a PhD in English. She’s worked as a teacher, scholar, editor, writer, and bookseller (at Little Professor Book Center in Alabama). When she’s not writing books, she’s a professor at a local college. She now lives near Washington, DC, with her husband and two sons. You can follow her on Twitter @LisaMaxwellYA or learn more about her upcoming books at Lisa-Maxwell.com.

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Unhooked

Once upon a time, there was a boy not so very far from being a man. He crossed a sea to venture to London, for he wanted to find his brother, who was the bravest of soldiers. He carried with him only a light pack, for he had every intention of returning. . . .

Chapter 1

OUTSIDE THE RAIN-SPLATTERED WINDOW of the taxi, London looks like it’s dressed for a funeral. The streets are a blur of monotone gray, and the sidewalks are filled with commuters scurrying home under dark, faceless umbrellas. When the car turns away from the main road, we find ourselves in a neighborhood of empty streets that shine darkly in the rain, the quiet houses still waiting for their owners to return.

The driver makes one more turn before stopping at a corner and glancing over his shoulder at the three of us in the backseat. “One-Thirty-Three Gloucester Road,” he barks as he stops the meter.

My mom doesn’t make any move to get out of the cab. She’s sitting in the seat across from me, chewing absently on her thumb. Her eyes are wide as she stares out the window, but I’m not sure she’s actually seeing anything.

“I think we’re here,” I tell her gently, and she blinks over at me, like she’s startled to find me there.

My best friend, Olivia, looks up from her phone and peers out the window of the cab to see where we’ve stopped. Her brows bunch together as she stares out through the rain. “Are you sure this is it, Gwen?” she

asks, not even bothering to disguise her disappointment.

I'm not really surprised the house doesn't meet Olivia's expectations. She grew up in the sort of place that can only be called an estate. Before my mom decided to move us to London, we actually lived in her family's gatehouse, while my mom worked on commissioned art for Olivia's parents—pretty much anything would be a disappointment by comparison. But when I lean over to see the building Olivia's looking at, my stomach sinks.

One-Thirty-Three Gloucester Road stands apart from the other brick and stone buildings that crowd the street. Narrow alleys flank either side of its redbrick walls, almost like the other houses don't want to get too close. Its peaked roofline soars at least one story above its flat-roofed neighbors, and its chimneys claw toward the gray sky. A wrought-iron balcony on the third story looks like it's barely holding on to the ivy-covered brick, and one of the windows on the second floor has been boarded up.

"Are you sure this is the address you were given?" I ask my mom, who by now has also noticed where we've stopped.

"I . . . think so." Her face betrays only the slightest bit of uncertainty, but her hands shake as she searches through her lumpy oversize bag. It seems like her hands always shake unless she's holding a paintbrush, especially lately.

Finally she retrieves a worn envelope and pulls out the contents. A deep crease forms between her brows as she looks over the papers.

"Let me see," I say, taking the crumpled sheets when it's clear she's having trouble finding the information she wants. Which is just another sign of how overwhelmed and anxious she's been recently—she's looked at those papers so many times in the last few days that they're creased almost to tearing.

Ignoring the way she's picking nervously at the hem of her coat, I scan through the narrow script to find the address that's been arranged for us by her newest commission. Then I lean forward and check it with the driver. He gives me a gruff confirmation before opening his door to start helping us with the bags.

In the seat next to me, Olivia has gone very still. I think she's suddenly realized her hastily conceived decision to invite herself along to help us move might not turn out quite the way she'd expected.

"I guess this is it," I say, breaking the silence that has overtaken the cab. I hand the envelope back to my mom.

Her eyes meet mine as she takes the papers, and her mouth presses into what might be the start of a smile. Her expression is so expectant, and I know she's waiting for me to say something. Because, usually, this is where I'd paste on a smile of my own and make the best of things. This time, I just stare back at her.

Her expression falters, and she looks away before I do. Without another word, she steps out of the stuffy warmth of the car, pulling the hood of her jacket up against the rain.

But I don't follow her. Not right away.

I'm used to ending up in all sorts of odd places—a trailer park in Sedona, a shacklike cottage near a beach in Costa Rica infested by tiny lizards (which, thankfully, ate the not-so-tiny bugs), a gorgeous jewel box of a

studio apartment in Prague. My life has been a series of poorly timed moves for as long as I can remember. But something about this place has me pausing.

“You know my parents would let you live with us back in Westport,” Olivia whispers when I don’t get out of the car. “We have plenty of room, and they’re never around enough for you to even bother them. You don’t have to move. Or live here. I mean, it’s less than a year until you’re eighteen, and I know we could convince your mom—”

I shake my head before she can say anything more. It’s not that her offer isn’t tempting. It is—too tempting. For the last week I’ve been hoping Olivia would offer this exact thing, but now that she’s holding out a different future like a lifeline, I can’t seem to grab hold. I see the way my mom’s slight shoulders are swallowed up by her coat, the way her hands clench nervously as she supervises the driver unloading our bags, and I know I need to stay.

“You really want to spend our senior year here?” Olivia asks, surprise clear in her expression.

“No.” I shake my head. Of course I don’t. But I’d been stupid to think our life in Westport could last. For the first time since I could remember, I’d felt almost at home somewhere. With Olivia’s friendship as a shield, I never had to prove myself like I had in so many other places. I’d almost felt like I finally belonged.

But even if I could convince my mom to let me go back with Olivia—which is more than doubtful—I can’t just leave her.

“She doesn’t have anyone else,” I explain to Olivia for the thousandth time. And neither do I.

“You can’t give up your life for her, Gwen.” Olivia’s voice is gentle, like it always is when she makes this argument.

And I get it, but . . . “I know. I won’t,” I say, trying to convince myself as much as her. “But I need to make sure she’s settled here. I have to know she’s okay before I leave.”

Olivia stares at me with those bottle-green eyes that see more than most give her credit for. “Your mom might never be okay,” she says gently. “What about college?”

I have no idea. “I have a year to figure that out,” I tell her, which is what I’ve also been trying to tell myself. “A year to get her ready.”

Olivia frowns, like she wants to say something more, but she doesn’t. She knows me well enough to know when not to push.

There’s nothing else I can say, so I give Olivia a shrug and get out of the taxi. The air is thick, and the rain feels cool against my cheeks. Even though the driver has already started to take our bags to the front porch, my mom hasn’t moved to follow him. She’s staring up at the dark facade of the house, like she doesn’t even notice the heavy drops falling from the gray sky.

“Why don’t you go wait on the porch, and I’ll help with the bags?” I say, nudging her gently in the direction of the house. Her eyes are tight with worry when they meet mine, and for a moment I think she’ll argue. But she doesn’t. Instead, she fishes some crumpled pound notes out of her purse and offers them to me before she shuffles toward the house.

As the driver returns from depositing the last load of our luggage, Olivia still doesn't look like she's going to get out of the car. With her dad's credit card in her wallet, she could be at the airport and on a first-class flight back to her own life before I even unpack. Our whole friendship could be nothing more than a story about this girl I once knew, and I wouldn't blame her at all. It's what people do, isn't it? They move on. They forget.

But a second later, Olivia surprises me by climbing out of the car's dry interior. She hitches up her hood and gives me an impish grin before running for the rusted gate. Even with the rain soaking me, I can't help but laugh.

By the time I've paid the driver and I'm ready to follow them up the wide steps to the arching front porch, my jacket is completely soaked and my short hair is plastered to my head. But with Olivia waiting, somehow I don't feel quite as cold.

"Ready?" my mom asks once the taxi disappears around the corner. Her hands tremble at her sides, like she's having second thoughts about knocking. Or maybe she's just waiting for my approval. Usually, we'd be in this together, but this time I haven't been able to fake it. This time I don't want to.

"It'll be fine," my mom says as she knocks on the heavy door. Her voice sounds like she's swallowed something bitter and hard that hasn't quite worked its way down her throat. And I can't tell who the words are meant for. "We're safe," she whispers to herself.

As we wait for someone to answer, I pretend I didn't hear her.

My mom knocks again, this time harder, but it seems like no one is home. Olivia shoots me a doubtful look as we stand huddled in the entry, and I adjust my worn duffel bag on my shoulder and try to look confident. But the truth is, I'm not sure what my mom will do if no one answers. She's not exactly good with the unexpected.

Then, just as I'm about to suggest that we call another taxi, a shuffling comes from within, followed by the mechanical swish-click of locks receding. After the third lock releases, the door lurches open to reveal a small, wizened man with glasses so thick, they make his cloudy eyes appear three times larger than anyone's should be. I'm barely five feet, and the man isn't any taller than I am. I can't help but think that if goblins were real, he could almost pass for one.

"Yes?" His voice grates across my skin as he looks us over. I can only imagine what he's seeing. We make quite a trio with my mother's wild red hair and even wilder, paint-marred clothes; Olivia's classic beauty; and me, in my exhausted and rumpled glory. His eyes rest on me last, and his nose gives an odd twitch. His stare is a little too intense to be comfortable, and from the scowl on his face, I can tell he finds something about me lacking.

I glance away and resist the urge to smooth down my soaked jacket.

"Arrangements have been made for us to lease your flat," my mom says, thrusting the creased papers toward him.

The man stares at her for a long, awkward moment before he finally takes them from her outstretched hand. He reads one sheet and then the other, and when he's finished, he glances up at us. With another questioning look at my mom, he jerks his head toward the interior and disappears into the house.

My mom follows him without too much hesitation, but Olivia grabs my arm. "Are you sure about this?"

Of course I'm not sure. I give her a halfhearted shrug. "I guess we should go in," I say instead, avoiding her eyes as I follow my mom into the house.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Nathan Lawhorn:

Book is to be different for each and every grade. Book for children right up until adult are different content. To be sure that book is very important for people. The book Unhooked had been making you to know about other information and of course you can take more information. It is rather advantages for you. The book Unhooked is not only giving you considerably more new information but also being your friend when you experience bored. You can spend your personal spend time to read your book. Try to make relationship using the book Unhooked. You never feel lose out for everything in the event you read some books.

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Lillian Thrasher:

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