

Book Review: The Ones We Love
By Anna Snoekstra

Thanks to NetGalley and Penguin Group Dutton for this advance reader's copy, in exchange for an honest review. "The Ones We Love" has an expected publication date of May 6, 2025.

I've seen several reviews referring to this book as a "gripping suspense novel." I'd agree the suspense was present in spots. But gripping? Nope, can't go there. I'll explain.

The Jansen family – father Janus and mother Kay, and their daughter Olivia (Liv) and son Casper – have recently relocated from Australia to Los Angeles after Janus's best-selling book was optioned for a screenplay. Beyond culture shock, their lives rapidly spiral out of control following a weekend party Liv attended. She wakes up in her brother's bed (he's away at swim camp) feeling sick and covered in bruises. And she can't remember anything about the night before.

Liv's confusion is magnified when her mother admonishes her, saying, "We're not going to talk to anyone about last night." But she doesn't tell Liv what happened. Her father, Janus, becomes distant and evasive. Her brother Casper, who returns from swim camp two days later, is caught up in the mystery of why everyone is acting so strange. And the clandestine atmosphere is heightened when Kay puts a padlock on Liv's bedroom door, claiming there's a mold issue.

From there the narrative plods along. Ever so slowly, through backstory and breadcrumbs dropped along the way, we come to better understand the main characters and what may have happened the night of the party – but it moves at a glacial pace. Then, around three-quarters of the way through the pace quickens and the narrative becomes more readable, even if not fully believable. I mean, sleepwalking into a neighbor's house where you babysit, waking up, and the son takes you out for pancakes? That's a stretch.

The story does demonstrate how poor communication can tear people apart. Coverups, literally attempting to bury the bad and make believe it never happened, don't work. They're temporary fixes at best. Eventually, as happens in this book, the lies catch up, and more often than not they lead to someone's undoing.

That doesn't happen here, however. And the result is an ending that not only loses steam, but it also becomes implausible. Surely, someone must pay, right? Well ...

I give "The Ones We Love" three stars, mostly because once it got going, it wasn't too bad. But gripping it isn't.