



Side Effects May Vary

Julie Murphy

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When sixteen-year-old Alice is diagnosed with leukemia, she vows to spend her final months righting wrongs. So she convinces her best friend, Harvey, to help her with a crazy bucket list that's as much about revenge as it is about hope.

But just when Alice's scores are settled, she goes into remission, and now she must face the consequences of all she's said and done.

Side Effects May Vary Details

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Glass says

All mixed reviews made me read it. Jasprit gave up on 50%, Alise and Giselle were annoyed by main character, but Brandi and Christy gave me hope that it might not be that bad. Where does that leave me?

Better than that other popular book about cancer. Earlier this year I read the famous The Fault In Our Stars by John Green and I failed to find it appealing as many other readers. There was "something" that felt off and I couldn't buy the whole "we are dying and everything is rainbows and unicorns" atmosphere. It was a good book, but hype messed up with my expectations. That was one of the reasons why I skipped Maybe One Day by Melissa Kantor and why I avoided Side Effects May Vary. But after reading all reviews and comments about Alice and how "insensitive" or "bitchy" she is, I knew that I was on to something different. Because seriously, if someone tell you you'll die soon, you will be angry and selfish and bitchy. Because on one wants to die.

Why do I think this book deserves higher ratings? It felt real. Julie Murphy did an excellent job with dual point of view. Alice is mean, self-centered, she treats people badly, she is selfish and she is terrified. Scared of dying, scared of her illness coming back, scared of losing people she loves, scared of facing her own actions, scared of living when she knows that everything can change in one second. That is why she pulls whole tough act and pushing away everyone she loves. Other reason? The way people in her school acts - yes, in real life you'll be a freak show. Author did a good job of portraying everyone.

I can't wait for Julie Murphy's next book. I stayed up all night to finish reading Side Effects May Vary and went to bed thinking that she is an author I'd have to keep my eye on. Her second novel (not the sequel), *Dumplin'* will be published next year. *Let's hope it will be even better.*

Rating: 4.5 stars

Review posted at Ja ?itam, a ti?

****Copy of this book was provided by publisher, Harper Collins, via Edelweiss in exchange for an honest review.****

Khanh, first of her name, mother of bunnies says

I'd always heard that when you truly love someone, you're happy for them as long they're happy. But that's a lie. That's higher-road bullshit. If you love someone so much, why the hell would you be happy to see them with anyone else? I didn't want the easy kind of love. I wanted the crazy love, the kind of love that created and destroyed all at the same time.

They say it takes a bitch to know one, and it will come as no surprise to many people that I found myself loving this book.

I love the lies. I love the manipulation. I love the bitterness. Or rather, I hated the main character. I hated her manipulation. I hated how she used people. I hated her doormat of a love interest.

But the thing is I loved hating them.

You are not meant to like these people. Make no mistake, Alice is a horrible, horrible person. What this book does so spectacularly is its ability to portray someone who feels real. Someone deeply flawed, someone so complex that you cannot help **understanding** them and **sympathizing** with them while **hating them with every cell of your being**. This book was so tremendously well-written.

Think about it. If you're going to die, and there are people in your life who deserve what's coming to them. Fuck, I know what I would do. I'm going to be a fucking bitch and do all the shit I could never have gotten away with otherwise before I die. **It's called revenge**, and it tastes as sweet as a plate of dark-chocolate covered orange peels, served to me by a half-clad Tom Hiddleston.

Whoo. Excuse me. Yum.

This book is not purely about revenge, it is about an immature girl, so caught up in a lie involving her family, that---in typical teenager style---she latches onto that as an excuse to act out, to be a jerk. **The cancer is merely the catalyst to her anger.**

You're not going to like Alice.

The Summary: Some people feel that their life begins anew when they receive the news that they are recovering from terminal cancer.

*Dr. Meredith took a deep breath. "Alice." His brown eyes found mine, and it was only me and him. He exhaled. "You're in remission."
Oh shit.
This, I did not expect. This was not on my list.*

While most people would rejoice at the prospect that they're going to LIVE, Alice is most unhappy about this. You see, she has lived the last year of her life knowing it was her last---including doing some rather unsavory things. It wasn't an entirely angelic year. There's no Make-A-Wish-Foundation final Disneyland trip with posed family pictures of Mickey Mouse shit here.

THEN:

You see, last year, there were some people who wronged Alice. And before she dies, she's going to make them pay.

Harvey is her best friend. They have literally lived their lives next to each other, their parents are best friends, and Harvey and Alice have grown up alongside each other. Harvey adores her. Every pair of best friend has a ringleader, and the leader of their little duo has always been Alice. He can see nothing, no one but her.

*On that cold night in January it all slipped into place for me and she became my everything and my everyone. My music, my sun, my words, my hope, my logic, my confusion, my flaw.
I was thirteen years old, and she was all these things to me.*

And I was her friend.

Alice treats Harvey like a dog, meaning she knows he'll always be there for her, she knows he will come when she shouts "Fetch!"

"Harvey," I said, my voice low. "Trust me."

I knew what this looked like. It looked like I was using Harvey. But here was the reality of the situation: the minute my life went from semipermanent to most likely temporary, I decided to latch on to everything in my world that had always been permanent, and for me, Harvey was so permanent he was concrete.

Everyone has the sort of people who become a pebble in the shoe of life. Alice has several, namely Luke, the asshole ex-boyfriend---the one who revealed a secret, and Celeste, a lifelong nemesis and rival. Alice wants to get even, and get even, she does.

I can't say they don't deserve it. Luke is an asshole. He is homophobic, he is an abuser, he is a cheater. And he's about to get what's coming to him.

Luke hauled ass out of the locker room and ran for the ladder to the projector, which ran up the back of the bleachers opposite us. To Alice's absolute delight, he wore nothing but a towel. Luke leaned forward a little farther and his towel began to slip. He wasn't fast enough to catch it. We all watched as the white piece of fabric drifted slowly down to the bleachers below, leaving him in nothing but his skin.

Alice doesn't just use Harvey, she abuses him. She pushes him, using his love for her to enlist his help in executing her revenge.

I shook my head again and Alice took my hand, pulling me to her.

"Please," she whispered, so close to me that when she spoke, our lips touched.

"Fine, but after this I'm done."

NOW:

"What do you want, Celeste?"

"All I want is for you to feel welcome. It's cute how people are so excited to have you back."

She took two steps closer to me. "They don't know what I know. The cancer might be gone, but the bitch isn't."

Now, Alice is going to live. And it completely sucks. She has to face up to all she's done at school. She has to face the hostile glares, the people she's alienated.

We stopped in front of the last case. Every surface was covered in cloth. Old, dying flowers had been thrown across the surface. There were candles; those idiots could have started a fire. And pictures of Alice. Her eyes had been crossed out and things like bitch or whore had been written across each print.

Now, she has to face what she had with Harvey. Their moments of tenderness, as he held her while she was dying. **Harvey was fine for Alice when she had no future, but now that she's going to live, she can't bear to face him.** Now, Alice plays with other boys, so she doesn't have to admit what she feels for Harvey.

Pushing away my memories of Harvey, I shoved Eric's shoulder back and straddled his lap.

This wasn't scary or complicated like being with Harvey. This didn't have to mean so much.

Now Alice has to face up to everything she's done. She has to confront her family. She has to come to terms with the fact that she has her whole life ahead of her.

Will Alice's future be one without her best friend?

I laid my head against him and he wound his arm around my shoulder. "What's going to happen to us, Harvey?"

He pressed his lips to my head and said, "It's a surprise, I think."

Alice: The characters in this book were so well-done, and I loved how Alice was written, while hating her. Alice is not a likeable character. She is selfish, she is a teenager. She blows things out of proportion. **At the beginning of the book, Alice finds out that her mother is having an affair.** That one single event becomes the stimulus for everything she does in the book. It becomes her drive for revenge. Teenagers can blow one single event out of proportion, and as frustrating as it is to the reader, that becomes her driving force. **Cancer gave Alice a free pass to her anger.**

Cancer would take away plenty. My hair, my body, my life. What I'd never realized, though, was that there was one privilege to dying: the right to live without consequence.

I hated her selfishness and her manipulation as I reveled in horror as I read about what she did. She uses her best friend, Harvey, as she sees fit.

After a moment, he threw his arms up and said, "God, what the hell, Al? This is so screwed up. You don't talk to me for a year and now—no, this is ridiculous."

I loved her anger, I loved her self-hate, because a person cannot act like this and not be utterly fucked up on the inside. Alice doesn't know how to be kind, it's like her mind thinks one thing, and she does another. She willfully sabotages every remote bit of kindness that comes to mind.

"I—I'm sorry. I didn't mean for it to sound that way." I almost said it, that I was sorry for how I'd acted and what I did, but instead I said, "Do you want to write up your own apology and I can sign it? Would that work better for you?"

Alice hates her mother's actions---what she sees as a **desecration of love**.

This feeling that the world was so pleased to call love destroyed people every day and it would do that to me too. It would disappoint and deceive and manipulate. But then, the part of me that was dying thought, What would it matter? If I wasn't going to live long enough to have to worry about the aftermath of it all, what did it matter?

I loved it when Alice snaps. **Like all good characters, there's a moment when everything comes to a climax, and boy, was it worth it to see Alice fall to pieces.**

"You should've left us then. Ripped the Band-Aid off. Because the lies are destroying us," I said, my voice catching on every syllable. "You ruined me. You made me this way. This." I motioned to myself, my chest heaving now. "Is your fault. And now it's too late to fix it."

Harvey: Initially, he got on my nerves. He thinks the sun rises and sets on Alice. For most of the book, he puts up with Alice's bullshit without a fight. In his effort to get over Alice, it almost feels like he's using

someone else, as he's pushing himself to like someone for the sake of liking someone. Harvey doesn't know how else he can move on, even as he realizes that he can never totally escape her.

I wanted to lie to her and tell her that I didn't like Alice in that way, but I couldn't. "I don't know. But I'm not on a date with Alice. I'm here because I like you. That's not a good answer, but I won't lie to you."

But as much as he is a doormat, Harvey isn't an ass. He's just a guy who's hopelessly entwined within Alice's web.

"Yeah." I was an ass. I knew from the moment I asked Debora out that I wasn't over Alice. I was too selfish to even bother wondering how this might end.

The Other Characters: I loved everyone else. All the side characters were brilliantly portrayed. There is a authentic dynamic between their relationships, and every single character feels **human**.

There are minor characters, like Debora, the really nice, smart girl who captures Harvey's attention---whom Alice instantly, irrationally hates. She is so fucking nice and my heart broke for her involvement in Harvey and Alice's twisted version of love. **I loved the relationship between Alice and her mother, both with strong personalities. They are two negatives sides to a magnet: put them together, and they will repel each other.**

Most mothers don't talk to their daughters like that, but my mom and I had never been most mothers and daughters. I remembered reading about wolf packs when I was younger. Each wolf pack could only have one alpha, one chief. This was the very unfortunate truth of my mother and me. We were two alphas who could never coexist in peace. The only time we had was when she thought I was dying.

This was such a frustratingly amazing read. **If you wanted adorable characters you could love, run far away. If you want devastatingly believable, hatefully flawed characters, you need this book.**

Giselle says

I loved parts of this book, while others irritated me. Or I should say Alice irritated me. However, the angle of getting a second chance at a life you were done and over with does give you food for thought for which I applaud. Cancer books are not stories I go into lightly; there's so much cancer in real life already, why would I want to read about yet another victim of this monster? Still, there's something about this one that called to me and I'm glad I read it. It brings up a different, highly thought-provoking side to a terminal illness. It's a great story, but the characters made loving this book a stubbornly difficult task.

Alice had her whole life ahead of her. Sure she had a cheating boyfriend and other crappy stuff going on, but she was pretty, smart, and full of potential. Told in "now and then" perspectives, we get to see what happened during her diagnosis, then how she reacts to being told she was now in remission. Which, surprisingly, was not altogether happy news for Alice - considering she spent her last days being a complete bitch, uncaring of any consequences she wouldn't live to see anyways. Unlike most bucket lists, Alice's was not about doing things for her, but rather about getting the last word. I was expecting to sympathize with Alice enough to get behind these pranks of hers, but I just felt bad for everyone around her. High school relationships fail. High school kids cheat and spread secrets. It's hardly worth your last ditch effort in the

most literal of sense. I completely understand her anger towards her own declining health, especially when these people who did her wrong are able go on with their lives, but still, it was frustrating to see her concentrate on the wrong things. I mean, what about Harvey, girl?

Romantically, Alice is a whole 'nother story. She treats Harvey like mud on her shoes and I hated her for it. She refuses to admit she loves him. Worse, she refuses to let *him* love *her*. Yet when he tries to move on she gets angry. I seriously wanted to throw book across the room. She plays him like a puppet whenever she pleases, just to ignore him the next day. I guess in a way it's also his fault for letting her string him along, but if this book did not have two sides of a story, I would not have had the patience for it.

Fortunately, it did have another side: the psychological angle of literally getting your life back, and I absolutely loved that part. Even though I despised Alice for how she acted, I still understood that she was living with an incredibly broken mental and emotional state. This book shows us how a sudden chance at a future can be just as distressing as it can be elating - I know you wouldn't think it a bad thing ever, but this girl was 100% ready to die. Imagine, one day you're living with no need or reason to think of long term commitments or consequences for things you say and allow yourself to feel (plus secrets you're keeping), but then all of a sudden everything matters, because you're actually going to see tomorrow. How she'd been living, was because she was dying. There's a catch to her remission, too: A miracle like this remains uncertain. She's still living in cancer's shadow. Would you allow yourself to fall in love, to make commitments, knowing it could slap you in the face again? I may not have liked or agreed with Alice's behavior - at all - but I did get that she was blocking herself off. It does make you think, and putting the reader in the characters' shoes is important in a story like this.

Love and hate is my relationship with this book. Nevertheless, I would recommend it to contemporary lovers, though with a warning that patience will come in handy when it comes to Alice.

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An advance copy was provided by the publisher for review.

For more of my reviews, visit my blog at [Xpresso Reads](#)

Stacy says

Julie Murphy, she has ruined me.

People, this book is the type of book that makes you question your enthusiasm for the other books you've read, because this book is everything - voice, pacing, wit, characterizations, the infinite moments of memories, the ending.

This non-linear book reminds me one of my favorite reads, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Not that the story is the same, it's that the feel of the story is the same. That both Alice and Arnold Spirit are learning to live with their present self - no matter what that present self is. And this learning, the journey that took Alice (& Arnold in TATDPTI) down an unfamiliar road will have you laughing, crying, offering hugs of support and waggling your eyebrows in dismay.

Also, I'm starting the official #TeamHarvey and #TeamAlice campaign. They are everything. And more.

Chelsea ♥Peril Please♥ says

Karma was a bitch, but so was I.

Once upon a time, there was a girl. This girl grew up with her best friend, her partner in crime, and they were inseparable. She was the ring-leader, and **he'd follow her anywhere**. He'd do anything for her, because he had fallen madly in love with her. They got to high school. They drifted apart. Then one day, her world shattered with the uttering of three simple words: *You have cancer*. And with the proclamation of these words, the world became clearer. Her world began to focus, align. She would get the boy on her side again. She would start a bucket list. But not just any bucket list-**she would make all those who wronged her pay**. Her story isn't pretty. Her story isn't nice. She manipulates, breaks hearts, and makes people's lives (or one person's in particular) a living hell. You will not like her. You will not condone her actions. But you will finish this, and you will sympathize with her. Your morbid curiosity-and longing for the boy to get what he wants-will win out...but you won't like the harsh reality. **I warned you.**

Cancer would take away plenty. My hair, my body, my life. What I'd never realized, though, was that there was one privilege to dying: the right to live without consequence.

Wow. I just don't even know what to say to this?? What a harsh, manipulative, heart-breaking, addicting book. Never have I read something that conflicted my feelings so much...okay, lies-But it's been a while! I went into this not really knowing what I was getting myself into. The reviews are dreadfully mixed, ranging from 'wow this was epic' to...yeah, I won't even say it. Alice isn't a nice girl-of that I was sure of. But the extents she goes to?? I just never...I never expected it. Now, listen to this. It wasn't even the payoff. **Sorry, guys, her bucket list was epic**. But no, she treated Harvey, her best friend, the boy who has loved her since they were kids, like shit. This? This was extremely hard to handle.

When the girl you loved was dying, it was hard not to let yourself go with her.

Everyone knows I am always on the boy's side. It's inevitable-that's just meeeeeee. But in this one, I don't see

how you *couldn't* feel horrible for the boy. How you *couldn't* fall in love with him and be on his side. He was the kindest person ever-He'd drop everything to help Alice. He'd humiliate himself in front of the whole school to save her. **He'd protect at any and all costs, even if he felt like he was losing a piece of his soul-** and he did. He really, truly lost a part of himself in this story, and it tore me to shreds. He would sacrifice everything for her...but there's a point where even the most in love, dedicated guys can't take the heartache anymore. Naturally this was when I felt like my heart had went through a wood chipper. Enough was enough....**but when you're madly, truly, deeply in love with someone, when do you give up?** Never.

When I dropped her off, she gave me a quick kiss on the cheek, a small gesture that she knew would appease me. I hated myself for letting it be this way, and I hated her for making it this way. But, really, I loved her, and that hurt the worst of all because I was tired of being her debris.

Alice was a bitch. A manipulative asshole. A vengeful little shit. She was beyond redemption and deserved everything that came her way...but, yet....I understood her. **I even *liked* her sometimes**-Go figure. But, as I said, every time she manipulated Harvey I didn't like her. Anyone that can treat someone that way is disgusting, no matter the circumstances. What she went through was horrible, dreadful, but in no way excused treating someone you love that way. Her bucket list was complete, she was on her death bed, when she finally gets the news any person would cherish and grip onto with their last shred of hope and dignity-*You're in remission*. But not Alice-Alice has a lot to atone for...and she's in deep shit.

Oh shit.

This, I did not expect. This was not on my list.

One thing I must say was that the writing wasn't quite what I'd expected it to be-It didn't flow as much as my favorite books have lately and it was missing a lyrical quality I've grown accustomed to, but that is probably due in part to the intensity of every page. You weren't focused on the writing so much as Harvey's heart breaking into little tiny pieces chapter by chapter, and of course that stunted every line, every paragraph-**the lines were blurred, but only because I couldn't believe what I was reading.** It was written in a then and now fashion, which I loathe normally. But as the story progressed, it only served to produce impact-POWERFUL IMPACT...and it made me think the story was perfect as it was and I wouldn't change a thing.

I'd known her my whole life. Other girls didn't exist for me in the same way she did. They had been there all along, these feelings; the only thing that had changed was my understanding of them. My whole body finally connected the dots, and I realized that even if we were never together, she'd ruined me and I'd never feel that way about anyone again.

**On that cold night in January it all slipped into place for me and she became my everything and my everyone. My music, my sun, my words, my hope, my logic, my confusion, my flaw.
I was thirteen years old, and she was all these things to me.
And I was her friend.**

So, if stories with a morally ambiguous character aren't your thing, I'd steer clear of this story altogether. It's not a sweet story (unless you count Harvey and Alice's love story), it's not light or easy or wholly likable...but it has heart. It has substance. And it might or might not be gratifying, in the end....but this story became beyond addictive and had my stomach in knots from beginning to end....**And never has revenge tasted so sweet.**

For more of my reviews, please visit:

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

"I knew how to die. It was the living that scared me."

At a time when cancer has become nearly cliché in young adult romance stories, Julie Murphy comes up with a new spin on things. Everything was going great for Alice. She was surviving her freshman year in high school, was the best ballet student in her class, had landed a popular boyfriend . . . but then she saw

something that she couldn't unsee, found out Mr. Perfect was cheating on her with her arch nemesis and as a cherry on the shit sundae she was diagnosed with leukemia. When the chemo stops working and she is faced with the reality that she is going to die, Alice creates a "Just Dying To-Do List" and enlists the help of her former BFF Harvey. The one thing Alice wasn't prepared for after getting her revenge??? Remission.

It should go without saying that I am an old lady who **really** digs reading young adult stories. At this point it's probably safe to officially declare my love for Julie Murphy as well, so let me count the ways:

1. I may love her so much that I subconsciously single-white femaled her because I pulled up her author page and realized I just cut and colored my hair so now we kind of look alike;

2. I love that she writes stories that make me feel like a kid again, and I'm **really** impressed that she makes me feel feelings

3. I love that she makes me want to read her stuff simply due to the titles;

4. I love that I loved the first book I read by her (Dumplin') so much I am interested in reading its sequel and I hardly ever read a sequel

5. I love that I didn't know *Side Effects May Vary* was by the author of Dumplin', but when I started reading it, I was all like "I KNOW I have read this author before;"

6. I love that Alice was an asshole. Like right away you find out Alice has never watched/ends up hating *A Christmas Story* so you know she's going to be awful, and the more you read the more it becomes clear that Alice was an asshole waaaaaaay before almost dying. That's real life, though. People – especially hormonal teens – sometimes ARE assholes. I'm tired of reading about perfect "John Greeny" types of adolescents and was happy to suffer through Alice's most cringey behavior in hopes of her getting a redemption arc at the end so I could be all

7. I love that this was a debut novel. Good grief this chick writes readable stuff;

8. I love that this was a different kind of love story

"I love you. And you know what that feels like? It's like a fucking cheese grater against my heart."

9. I love that I read this thing cover-to-cover in a couple of hours because I could not get enough.

In case you can't tell – it's A-Okay if none of you love this. I loved it enough for everyone

Elesia says

First things first, I want to say that this book was very honest and real. It's very raw and very real, it doesn't gloss over anything or romanticize cancer or it's side effects. That being said, while I can appreciate that about the book, I did not like this book.

My main problem with this book was the main character Alice. I did not like her at all. She's so mean, such a bully and so manipulative. She was just cold and heartless, not to mention so freakin' moody. With Harvey, she'd be clinging on to him one minute and then completely ignoring him and being a complete asshole to him the next.

Overall, this book had a lot of potential, it had a great plot but poor execution and I didn't like or connect with any of the characters, which made it very hard for me to enjoy the story. I would say if you're a fan of John Green or these kinds of stories, to still give it a shot! Hopefully you'll like it more than me!

Rachel Reads Ravenously says

DNF about 120 pages in.

I love Julie Murphy, but I'm not connecting with this book at all and it isn't for me.

Follow me on ♥ Facebook ♥ Blog ♥ Instagram ♥ Twitter ♥

Ashley says

Nose Graze — Book reviews & blogging tips

2.5 Stars

=== My review may contain some MINOR spoilers. They're super minor and vague though and won't ruin the book for you. I just vaguely highlight how long the MC is a bitch for and at what percentage she starts trying to not be a bitch. ===

I was disappointed in *Side Effects May Vary* :(There were two main problems for me: I didn't like the "then" and "now" style of narration (I don't think it worked well here), and the main character quickly became very unlikeable, and that made it hard to sympathize with her.

I'm perfectly fine with then and now narration in many books, but I don't think it fit in this one. The "then" is right after Alice got diagnosed with cancer, and "now" is over a year later when she's in remission. So the "then" is when she's first starting her bucketlist thing, and the "now" is when she starts dealing with the consequences of it. I think it felt jumbled and confusing because we'd read about the "now" chapters when she's dealing with the consequences, but at that point we still have no idea what she actually did to piss people off. So we have to slowly figure it out. I just think it made the story too confusing and even frustrated at times because I had to try to figure it out with little knowledge. Sometimes this style of writing really

works, but I don't think it was a good fit here.

And the bigger problem was Alice herself. Alice and I started out okay. I don't think I loved her, but I was open minded and giving her a chance. But she slowly got worse and worse. She kind of turned into a big bitch, and that made it SO hard for me to like her, sympathize with her, or even keep reading (towards the end). It felt like the whole story was about: "see how big of a bitch Alice can be for 95%, then watch her try to redeem herself in the last 5 pages". It just went on waaay too long with Alice being a bitch. Here are a few examples:

When she thought she was dying, she got really close to Harvey and basically told him she loved him (she didn't say it exactly, but it was implied). They were clearly almost in a relationship (they just hadn't defined it). Then as soon as she goes into remission, she completely ignores Harvey and treats him like shit. I felt so bad for the guy.

"Why are you acting like nothing happened between us when something did?"
—*Harvey*

Harvey was asked to drive Alice home from school since her parents were unable to. Harvey tells Alice this then says he'll bring the car around. He's in the car, waiting for her to get in (he's like right next to her.. she can see him), but she doesn't. He keeps waiting and waiting. Then:

With her back turned to me, I could see Alice had no intention of getting into the vehicle anytime soon. She was talking to Eric Guy. She couldn't talk to me, but she could talk to this asshole. So I honked. For thirty seconds straight. And then one more honk for good measure. Alice turned, and narrowed her eyes at me.

She knows he's ready to go and she just IGNORES him for like 15 minutes. She doesn't say, "*Hang on, I just want to finish up talking to Eric.*" She doesn't say ANYTHING. She just flat out ignores him. He's doing her a favour by driving her home and she's just being a bitch about it.

Then she did just plain stupid stuff like this:

I walked into our room on Sunday night and found Harvey in the process of putting his sheets on the top bunk. I threw my duffle bag on the floor and said, "*I call top,*" and walked out of the room.
—*Alice*

Maybe that's a stupid, small thing, but it's those stupid small things that built up and pissed me off. Harvey already had the top bunk. He was putting his sheets on it, and she just "claimed it" to piss him off. I wish Harvey had told her to screw herself instead of giving in and letting her have it. Who the hell does that?

Alice used Harvey. She used him to help her complete her stupid bucketlist, then once it was over, she abandoned him.

Being an imaginary friend was a one-way street. If that's what I was to Alice, then maybe she only ever saw me when she needed me. I wondered what would happen when I needed her.
—Harvey

Alice only wanted Harvey when she couldn't have him, and I hated that. She wanted him when she was dying (because she couldn't stay with him), she wanted him when he was with someone else (because it meant he wasn't hers), but then when she actually could have him, she didn't want him.

"You are hollow on the inside, Alice, did you know that?" She asked. "Rotten too. And no one cares. No one cares because you make it so difficult to."

This quote couldn't be more accurate. So clearly Alice's behaviour was intentional on the author's part, but I couldn't stand it.. especially when it just got worse and worse for like 90 or 95% of the book. I think I could have dealt with it if she was a bitch for 60% and spent the last 40% making up for it, but that wasn't the case. She was a mean person and then spent like 5 pages apologizing and that was it. It wasn't enough for me.

I think a lot of people will love this book because there is an interesting story there. Parts of it (especially about the cancer and how people acted) were really powerful. I'm just upset that the author decide to make Alice SO bitchy for so much of the time. She wasn't a nice person. I couldn't see what Harvey saw in her, because she completely used him. I hung in there for a good part of the book, but when I saw that it was still an issue like 75% through, I started getting really fed up and annoyed. I started skimming a bit at that point.

If you think you can deal with a bitchy character, or the above quotes don't bother you, then I do recommend you give *Side Effects May Vary* a try. Because as I said, it is interesting and I think a lot of people will love it a lot more than I did. But if you can't stand characters with a bit of a bitchy attitude, then you may want to avoid it!

eileen says

Check out more of my reviews at [Singing and Reading in the Rain!](#)

Side Effects May Vary, contrary to the positive reviews everywhere, was a strong miss for me. I found the main characters annoying, the pacing disarming, the severe gender stereotyping, and the organization messy. I was looking for a cancer book that would punch me in the gut with redemption and justification, but ultimately my gut was untouched and rather disappointed.

First of all, the pacing was rather a mess. We have four different perspectives happening, Alice and Harvey now, and Alice and Harvey then. Not only were Alice and Harvey's individual voices impossible to tell apart

most of the time, but the “then” and “now” scenes were completely jumbled up. We’d randomly have five chapters now, and then ten chapters then, and so on and so forth. It was disorganized, and the plot suffered because of it. The “then” was mostly to establish what Alice did when she first found out she had cancer, but with the lack of a pattern in the chapters, it seemed easier just to split the book into two parts, one half detailing what she went through before she went into remission, and the other half about how she coped with the consequences, as opposed to jumbled up chapters that confused and bored me.

Our two main characters, Alice and Harvey, are well-developed, with a palpable and sound characterization. By the end, I made the conclusion that *Side Effects May Vary* isn’t really about Alice; it’s about Harvey and his unrequited love for Alice. Either that or this book lost its way in my brain, because while Alice was the one dealing with leukemia, this book strongly focused on the hot-and-cold relationship of Alice and Harvey. Bluntly, Alice was a bitch, and Harvey was a pushover. Alice repeatedly used Harvey for her twisted bucket list of people she wanted to screw over. Personally, I understood why she may have held angry feelings towards these people, but the way she acted outside of those instances were unforgivable. In maybe the second chapter, after Alice finds out she’s in remission, there’s a chapter where she and Harvey are sharing an intimate moment together. Then in the next chapter, she’s hooking up with another guy and is apathetic towards Harvey when he catches her in the process of hooking up. Around halfway through the book, pages and pages later, Alice began harping on and on about how Harvey started dating another girl and how Alice had finally chose him, but he instead went and chose another girl. I would’ve been slightly sympathetic if she hadn’t done the same thing to him earlier with Eric.

Harvey, who was even worse than Alice, was a total pushover. He submitted to everything Alice told him to do, and even when everybody *knew* that he was being used by her, he seemed okay with it.

”You are in love with me, and you always have been. But this is the *truth*, Harvey: I don’t love you. Not at all. Not you, not anyone, and anything.” And because that wasn’t enough, because I hadn’t done enough damage, I said, “You’re sad and pathetic. You have no spine, and the fact that you think someone like me could ever love someone like you only proves my point.

After Alice acts like a total bitch to him, he still chooses to go back to her and he still loves her, no matter how bitchy she acts towards him. Harvey actually was a sweet guy, which made Alice deserve him even less because she insinuates that she’s almost better than him, in a way, and even when she tries to act nice, she ruins it with a complete move that made me want to punch her, even if she was in remission.

”You can’t apologize for my feelings and expect things to be better.” He paused. “Especially not when you’re the reason for them.”

I knew what he was talking about, but that hadn’t been what I meant. I didn’t think.
“Harvey—“

“No,” he said. “An apology like that makes it sound like you had nothing to do with why I was mad when you were what got me all angry in the first place.” His voice rose with each word.
“That’s not okay.”

“I—I’m sorry. I didn’t mean for it to sound that way.” I almost said it, that I was sorry for how

I'd acted and what I did, but instead I said, "Do you want to write up your own apology and I can sign it? Would that work for you?"

Jesus Christ, Alice, just because you had cancer doesn't mean that you can alienate your best friend and expect him to continue to be your friend after you said something like that. She constantly acted like the world owed her something for making her go through cancer, and while cancer is a devastating disease, she did not have the right to say, "I felt like the universe owed me this." The universe doesn't owe anybody anything. As pessimistic as it may sound, her having cancer doesn't make her special. Cancer is devastating, tragic, and I wouldn't wish it upon anybody, but people unfortunately still get it, and those who do may be entitled to certain things, but it doesn't give them the right to act like they're special or that everybody around them owes them something because they had cancer, which is exactly what Alice did. She was reckless, angry, and didn't seem to care how she could hurt those around her.

During the "then" chapters, while Alice was going through chemo, I had a question gnawing at my mind: Where were her parents? Harvey was the one driving her to and from her chemo sessions, and wouldn't you think that her parents would have wanted to be around for something like that? And when she was executing all of her pranks and screwing over all the people who had originally screwed her over, where were her parents? Where were the authority figures that disciplined her or at least Harvey? The stuff they did was *serious*, and there is no way that the principal didn't know about what they did.

Finally, the stereotyping used in *Side Effects May Vary*. A certain scene in general pissed me off, and it was when Alice met Tyson, a gay boy, in the bathroom. Even though they had never really talked before, Tyson started confessing pretty much his entire life story to her, even though no earlier relationship was established. Tyson then proceeded to start crying in the middle of his story, and while it may be true for some guys, it's an overused gay stereotype. All the gay guys are over emotional, and at first I let it go, but as the trend of stereotyping continued, it was harder to let go.

It wasn't really a guy car, but it was my car. —Harvey

Because gender stereotyping is totally okay, and admitting that having a car that's "girly" isn't something he's completely comfortable with is also okay, like "girly" things signify weakness and that you're a pussy, whereas guy things must signify manliness. Another example was when Harvey was confronting Alice about her always using him, and after she dismisses him quickly even though she knows he's right, he throws this line at her:

"You never surprise me, Alice, which is such a disappointment." —Harvey

That line was completely unnecessary in what they were talking about. Like "you're such a disappointment because you always use me and I always know that you're using me." But Alice is really shocked by what he said, and how I interpreted was that even though he knew that she was using her, he constantly kept coming to her, indicating how much of a pushover he was and how much of a manipulator Alice was. Out of context, Harvey's saying that it's Alice's job to surprise him and keep him on his toes, even though that's not what a

girl or guy's role should ever be in a relationship. While the irrelevant translation means nothing towards the actual book, that piece of dialogue should have been worded differently, like, "You're never going to change, Alice, which is such a disappointment." Something like that, something that didn't offend me as extremely as it did. It's nitpicky beyond nitpicky, but with the earlier instance (not all covered in this review), that one line really affected me.

While I understand why some people could have enjoyed this book, it was extremely hard for me to. The stereotyping thrown everywhere and Alice's character pissed me off to the point of no return, and I was extremely apathetic towards Side Effects May Vary.

Jeramey Kraatz says

Beautiful. Really, just beautiful.

Side Effects May Vary is witty and raw and heartfelt, and above all, brutally, wonderfully honest. It's one of those books that creates a world and characters so engrossing that you feel like they become a part of you, and that you have a vested interest in their lives. You fall into the world of Alice and Harvey so completely that when you come up for air you realize it's 3am and you only meant to read a chapter or two before going to sleep. It'll leave you thinking about it for days afterward.

I'm actually kind of bummed because I read this as a borrowed ARC (mailed across the state to me--it's that kind of book that makes you want to send it off to other people immediately after you finish it) because I'm the kind of reader who likes to underline and mark up passages I liked or found interesting or were just damned good writing. And I found myself wanting to do that over and over again here.

I can't wait for this book to be released so I can share it with other people.

Arlene says

Harvy = 5 Stars

Alice = 0 Stars

Rating Clarification = 2.5 Stars

Wow! What a tough book to warm up to! I haven't struggled with a protag this much in a long time. There were many moments in the story that I just about threw in the towel, so I surprise myself that I saw it all the way through.

Side Effects May Vary balances a potentially touching story between two very different protagonists. First you have sixteen year old Alice that is diagnosed with cancer. From one day to the next, she sees her life take a dramatic turn where she not only fights to stay alive but also struggles with coming to grips with some of the troubles in her life. Because her days are suddenly numbered, she decides to enlist the help of her longtime friend Harvey to exact some revenge on those who did her wrong.

However, when she finds herself in remission, she's not only forced to deal with her new reality but also the

consequences of her decisions that leaves many people angry and troubled with her actions against them.

Throughout the entire story, I struggled with trying to gain an ounce of sympathy for Alice. I simply didn't like her. I know... I know... we're talking about a kid that was dealt the c-card so an automatic sympathy pass should be granted. Well that just didn't happen. This kid was downright callous, selfish and mean! It confuses me why an author would develop a character in such a way. At first I felt like I was missing something, but no... Just about every character in the novel validated my feelings. One when so far as to say, "*The cancer might be gone, but the bitch isn't.*" Mean words, but I tell you she deserved them. Such a tough book to enjoy when you don't like the narrator.

Thankfully for this book, there was another side to this story that was told from Harvey's point of view. I loved this character and he was one of the reasons I saw this through the end. Harvey was kind, unassuming and aware. He knew he was being used by Alice and finally towards the end of the novel he makes some tough decisions that forces Alice to re-think who and what she is and how she treats people. Great balance in the story!

Overall, I struggled completely with **Side Effects May Vary**. Not one I feel comfortable recommending.

Waves of Fiction 2015 Reading Challenge
- Read a book that is a stand alone title.

Whitney Atkinson says

It literally took me like 3 minutes to snap out of this book's setting once i finished it

feels

hand gestures

lays down

(old)

I met the author at a book signing and she was completely awesome- I can't wait until this comes out!

Merna says

I guess this could be compared to *Fault In Our Stars*. Well, there's no use comparing *Side Effect May Vary* to *Fault in Our Stars*, and not because they have no similarities, it's merely the fact that all novels containing the subject of cancer always have vast resemblance. So what I'm evidently saying is: I will not judge this book based on its originality.

My blurb:

It's essentially about a girl named Alice who is revealed to have leukemia. She creates a bucket list of things she needs to complete before her death. Forming a close relationship with Harvey is one of them. They were buddies during their younger years before fate took them to different directions

“Then we’d drifted. High school did that to you, turned you into pieces of driftwood. And the parts of you that you’d tried to keep in one piece became the property of the wind and water, sending those dear pieces you were not.”

After a while their relationship begins to blossom again. Once Alice is certain her expiry date will come soon, her doctor exposes she’s on remission.

Well, this is when the story went downhill for me. Alice could not simply be happy about the revelation. **No she can’t.** Well, if she was then we would have to chop off 250 pages. So, we make her somehow upset about her remission. It’s not stated clearly why she is - only it makes her saddened for reasons too important to specify very clearly.

“I had Harvey, and I had him for good. Hadn’t that been all I wanted? To make those perfect moments last? But now I felt trapped, like a homeless person who’d been given their dream home only to suffer from intense wanderlust because we always wanted something until we have it.”

Nice simile.

But..

still not helping because you won’t distinctively tell me which part of getting better upsets you. I must have misread the book. Alice says, she’s unhappy about the remission because now she can be with Harvey. I don’t understand. Is she upset about that since her cancer will always be a shadow upon her life? Does it concern her that she will live in fear with Harvey knowing any minute she could lose him, therefore, she has lost that comforting certainty of when her death was already set?

Might be.

The relationship between Harvey and Alice is quite dysfunctional. Harvey genuinely loves Alice and demonstrates this more than enough. Alice feels the same way but she complicates their relationship, and it’s not because of her health, it’s her utter confusing attitude. I frequently felt as if the book was primarily about Harvey’s unrequited love for Alice. I would have liked to apprehend the motivation behind Alice’s actions, but it’s never rationalized explicitly.

Don’t give one sentences like: *“I knew how to die. It was living that scared me,”* and then expect me to completely understand the character. You need to dive deeper and express more in order for me to connect with the character’s emotional state.

For instance, after her remission, she attends school but becomes irritated by her classmate’s questions about her leukemia. After school that day, she meets a guy and begins chatting him up. Harvey finds her outside and says he should quickly drive her home, considering it’s cold, nevertheless she ignores him and continues

to chat to the guy while Harvey stands there waiting for her.

It seems this bitchy attitude can be excused because she has cancer. But why? It's not like cancer strips away your morals. Apparently, this must be it. Maybe that was the whole point of the story. Cancer or more specifically remission makes you a bitch, but you have to redeem yourself... Okay, that doesn't make sense. The story doesn't have much of a purpose which explains the lack of making sense.

Sometimes, I had thought Alice and Harvey were cute. I could almost see why they were so drawn to each other.

“You can play the cancer card forever, Alice.”

“You’re right, just until I’m dead. Then I dub you the carrier of the card, which shall henceforth be known as the ‘my friend died of cancer’ card.”

Then again, overuse of angst in romance really makes you think twice. Alice continuously angers Harvey by trying to make him jealous, and when he attempts to get over her by dating someone else then she would become overly jealous. See my problem? God that was so annoying.

Her attitude after her remission is just intolerable. She treats Harvey, who is relentlessly by her side, like shit because she can't handle her emotions. As suggested earlier, it would appear odious if I criticize the heroine's bad behavior since she has cancer. I, on the other hand, am not that easy enough to hand her the cancer card, and let her attitude go unnoticed. She basically behaves as if the world owes her something due to her sickness. Alice must have been misinformed about how the world works if that's what she thinks.

Not gonna work.

I could have liked Alice, and many times I did, but there was potential to build her character and provide reasonable and believable explanations as to why she chooses to act the way she does. It would have made the heroine's character development more thorough, instead of purely giving her an epiphany about her actions. (No, it was not a spoiler, in case you're thinking that.)

The non-linear structure of the book might be exasperating to readers. In my opinion, I thought it was done well and fit the book perfectly. The book switches from past to present. The past is the first year of her leukemia and when she is completing her bucket list. The present is set a year after which is throughout the duration of her remission. The POV is told from both Harvey and Alice. They have quite distinct voices. Harvey's tone sounds kinder and more caring, so you could easily identify it.

The book has its amusing and engaging moments, therefore it earns solely one star, plus an extra star for Harvey's character. But I don't find the book deserving of anymore. I initially finished the book with satisfaction until I really thought about the story, which then I found myself quite unsatisfied.

I'm sure some will enjoy this, but I find the book... *pointless* when it comes to realistic fiction.

Sorry. I noticed, I repeat myself quite a lot about how I disliked Alice's attitude. My repetition comes to

show how much I really do though...

Alise (Readers in Wonderland) says

Where I expected a deep and meaningful plot there was a **bland storyline mostly based on the petty revenge** of a young girl. Where I expected a mature, old-soul type main character there was a **shallow teen** who recovered from cancer and hates the world for it.

Characters in a Gif: Alice

I'm going to get right into this with Alice. This girl. This girl literally has a personal grudge against what seems like everyone on Earth. She's a **total bitch to her best friend** Harvey, who has done nothing but care for her and a **terrible daughter to her parents** who have to deal with their **only child having cancer**. Alice's M.O. is taking advantage of others, which includes **manipulating people's feelings and using a serious disease to get whatever she wants**.

And her first words after she finds out she is in remission? (Which isn't a spoiler because it's in the synopsis) is "Motherfucker." I mumbled. Alice was ready to die, expecting it, and almost even wanting it. **She's upset because the day before she told her best guy friend something and doesn't know "how to live with that."**

Let's look at a few Alice quotes:

"I wasn't a very good person unless I really made the effort to be."

"These last couple of weeks, I'd pushed him farther away while keeping him barely in reach."

Let me explain that one. Harvey, Alice's friend, has done nothing but be by Alice's side, care for her, and help her out with her revenge bucket list. He has made his feelings for her clear multiple times and she uses that to get him to do things for her and admits it. For example, Harvey had to drive her home one time and he waited right in front of her in his car while she flirts with another guy right in front of him and makes him feel like he's the rude one. Knowing he is pissed at her, she gives him a kiss on the cheek before she gets out of the car just to "appease" him.

"I think I like you," he said. It was more statement than confession. I flipped through channels, trying to pretend like I hadn't heard him because I didn't know how to respond."

"I liked that it was hard for him to be mad at me. And maybe I liked it a little too much."

"...every chance I could to bend over with my ass in the air or to brush my boobs up against Harvey's arm. I felt pretty stupid."

“I found myself plotting her demise. This wasn’t okay. He couldn’t be with someone, not so soon. I wanted to destroy her.”

Characters in a Gif: Harvey

Poor Harvey spends almost his entire SIDE EFFECTS MAY VARY life **being played like a fiddle by Alice**. He is constantly being pulled towards her then being pushed back, and **has no idea what’s going on**. Does Alice like him? Why is Alice being such a bitch? Alice Alice Alice Alice etc. I would pity him if I didn’t think he was so stupid for going along with all this.

He does **finally come to his senses** and stands up to her but it’s pretty anticlimactic and doesn’t last very long. **So he redeemed his character** (unlike Alice did) even if it was only for a moment. Someone needed to bring Alice back to the playing ground of the mere mortals after all her power trips.

As for the writing, I didn’t have any real issues with it, although it was definitely more telling than showing, which can be **very straightforward at times**. Pacing wasn’t all that spectacular either, as I found myself 20% done and thought it was more like 70%.

This is **not as deep or engrossing as The Fault in Our Stars**, it has more of a Better Off Friends feel combined with Revenge of the Girl with the Great Personality. **It does have entertainment value**, but if you can’t get past Alice’s behavior, this is one you might want to avoid.

**Quotes are to be check against a final version of the book.*

More reviews like this on Readers in Wonderland.
