

My eleventh #Book Bingo 2018 entry is '**A book with a one-word title**'. Once a month, I wear another book reviewer hat, I am the romance round up editor on the Australian Women Writers Challenge. Through this role, I am constantly introduced to great Australian novels, written by our talented crop of Australian women writers. Last month I discovered a book I couldn't wait to read myself after featuring it in my round up. *Lovesome*, a catchy one word title novel, is my pick for book bingo this time around.

Synopsis:

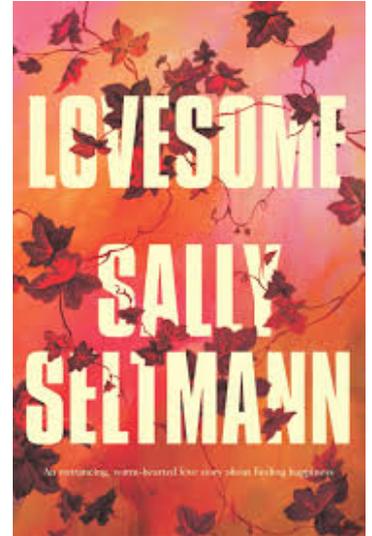
An offbeat and beguiling story of finding your own happiness.

My warm breath makes a beautiful fog in front of me. It's times like this when I feel most alive. I feel free, and at one with the world and everything around me. It's an invigorating version of euphoria. But I don't want to arrive home to no one; I want someone to come home to.

It's 1995 and 21-year-old Joni Johnson is fresh out of art school and loving her life. Working at Harland, a French restaurant, makes her happy – it's as romantic as she is herself. Harland's owner, Lucy, and chef, Dave, make her evenings both entertaining and complicated. By day, Joni sets up her easel in her backyard bungalow, turns on her music, and paints.

But when Joni's best friend, Annabelle, arrives on the doorstep one night ecstatic in love, everything changes. The life Joni has built for herself seems lacklustre in comparison to Annabelle's rising star. And when Annabelle makes a beeline for the one man who seems interested in Joni, it looks unlikely that their friendship will survive.

Tender, funny and romantic, *Lovesome* is a triumph.



My review:

Lovesome, written by debut author Sally Seltmann, is an alternative but gentle love story that completely encapsulates the sense of longing felt by those experiencing first love. A strong character driven story, it centres on a sweet lead, twenty one year old art school graduate Joni and a cast of eclectic friends, colleagues and love interests who colour her life. A book with a catchy one word title, this one won me over, with its unique love vibe.

Sally Seltmann situates her first novel, *Lovesome*, in the year 1995. Seltmann's lead is Joni Johnson, a young woman who has her whole life ahead of her. In the day Joni indulges in her passion for art and music. While in the evenings, Joni makes ends meet by working in a French themed bistro. Surrounded by interesting work colleagues and friends, Joni's life is exciting and is just about to take off. When Joni's best friend Annabelle, who has been forging a career as a professional singer in London arrives unexpectedly, Joni's life takes a different direction. Joni's life pales in comparison to Annabelle's glittering adventures in London. But, the friendship between Annabelle and Joni is tested when a man comes between their relationships. *Lovesome* examines the fallout from this relationship dynamic.

I always love to discover a new raw Australian writing talent and to be introduced to the work of Sally Seltmann via her first book, *Lovesome*, has been a highlight for me. I first came across *Lovesome*, Sally Seltmann's debut novel, while conducting a monthly round up of romance reviews on the Australian Women Writers Challenge. Another respected reviewer's opinion of this book definitely swayed my interest towards this book. When a surprise copy arrived in the mail, I found myself quietly smiling to myself and looking forward to delving into this book.

My initial vibe of this book was it is a young adult or even new adult tale, as *Lovesome* is solely narrated by main protagonist Joni Johnson, a rather sheltered twenty one year old girl. Although I am older than Joni, I still managed to connect to her world and experiences by simply casting my mind back to my past. I enjoyed this experience and I quite liked the wide eyed innocence of Joni. Seltmann allows us to follow Joni's character path through her insightful and comprehensive narrative voice. Joni's tale is not only a love story but a coming of age tale, which I am confident will resonate with many readers.

Seltmann fleshes out the pages of *Lovesome* with an eclectic mix of secondary characters. Annabelle was very self absorbed, I couldn't take to her very much at all! While I had a soft spot for Dave and Lucy who work at Harland, Joni's place of employment. By far Harland was the highlight of this novel. I loved Seltmann's descriptions of this quaint French restaurant. I just wanted to reserve a table at Harland and sit down with Lucy to discuss French fashion! There is also a great sense of nostalgia that emanates from the pages of *Lovesome*. The mid 1990's setting won me over, I loved the memories this book evoked of a time I also grew up and learnt so much about the mechanics of family, love, relationships and my calling in life.

The romance and love story aspect of this book is interesting. It doesn't develop fully until fairly late in the novel and I was almost wondering earlier on in my reading of *Lovesome* if I was going to see more thick action on the love front. Seltmann doesn't disappoint and when the complicated love story arrives it is fleshy, complicated, emotional and great to unpack. This is a book that thrives on character dynamics and interactions, rather than action, which may or may not appeal to some readers. I enjoyed this aspect of the novel; it offered an introspective look at first experiences and illuminates what it is like to finally find your feet in both love and life.

Seltmann offers readers a conclusive end to her first novel. Her prose often carries you away in its simplicity and direct commentary on life in general. I appreciated Joni's journey and the way in which Seltmann ended our time with Joni.

Lovesome is best described as really nice debut and an unassuming read that quietly surprised me. It is a love story that many can draw comparisons to, despite the young age of the narrator. A broad novel which is easy to embrace, I can recommend *Lovesome* if you appreciate a well crafted and slightly offbeat love story. I hope see and read more from Sally Seltmann in the near future.

Lovesome by Sally Seltmann was published on April 24th 2018 by Allen & Unwin. Details on how to purchase the book can be found [here \(https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/fiction/popular-fiction/Lovesome-Sally-Seltmann-9781760632878\)](https://www.allenandunwin.com/browse/books/fiction/popular-fiction/Lovesome-Sally-Seltmann-9781760632878).

To learn more about the author of *Lovesome*, Sally Seltmann visit [here \(http://sallyselmann.com/\)](http://sallyselmann.com/).

Lovesome is book #57 of the [Australian Women Writers Challenge \(http://australianwomenwriters.com/\)](http://australianwomenwriters.com/).

*I wish to thank Allen & Unwin for providing me with a free copy of this book for review purposes.