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Ralph's Party: A Novel

By Lisa Jewell

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"Lisa Jewell pulls off a rare trick which even the likes of Helen Fielding and Nick Hornby couldn't quite manage. She has written a book about relationships, which appeals in equal measure to men and women." -*The Times* (London)

Meet the residents of the London brownstone on 31 Almanac Road who together weave a tangled web of romance. Ralph, a ne'er-do-well artist, suddenly realizes he's head over heels in love with his new flatmate Jem, the most fun and sensible girl he's ever encountered. Unfortunately, Ralph's best friend, Smith, has already won Jem's affections, although Smith has not entirely given up his passion for the femme fatale, Cheri, who lives upstairs. Across the hall, Karl and Siobhan have been happily unmarried for years, until Karl gets a smashing job as a London rush-hour DJ and momentarily gets tempted into Cheri's cozy lair. These six star-crossed tenants become more enamored, and more confused, as the story progresses-until their true destinies are revealed on one crucial night-the evening of the extravaganza that is . . . Ralph's party. This wonderfully hip new novel was an instant popular success when it was first published in England, and American readers are sure to be captivated by the debut of a talented new writer.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Comparisons to Bridget Jones's Diary are sure to greet British author Jewell's American debut, but her tale of love among neighbors bears more resemblance to TV's Melrose Place. Intertwining the lives of six youngish, soul-searching and fun-loving characters who live in a trendy London brownstone, the author (who allegedly penned this book on a dare) sets her romantic comedy at 31 Almanac Road. A love triangle involves Ralph, a promising artist whose career is currently stagnant; his best friend and flat-mate, Smith, a self-centered, well-to-do PR man; and Jem, their vibrant new flat-mate, who falls for Smith even as Ralph is hopelessly smitten with her. Jewell takes a potshot at self-absorbed Gen-Xers with Cheri, a outrageously gorgeous, self-centered single woman and voracious man-eater. Karl and Siobhan have been together for 15 years, but their complacency is ruptured when Siobhan, fat and feeling unloved, goes for another guy and Karl is unfaithful with Cheri. Jewell satirizes tell-all media programs when Karl is propelled into stardom by detailing his personal woes on a radio show. Spicing up the fast-paced plot is Smith's long-running, long-distance obsession over Cheri and Jem's inexplicable attraction to Ralph, though she remains devoted to Smith. Enjoyable scenes include a hot chile-eating contest and Jem and Ralph's first visit to a sex-toy store, where they're initially nervous, but are soon examining the merchandise with gusto. An amusing denouement brings all six tenants together and wittily, neatly ties up their lives in a novel that won Jewell acclaim and a TV movie option in England, where this light delight was first published.

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From Kirkus Reviews

A shameless flirt of a first novel that traces the roller-coaster lives of six people sharing the same London brownstone. Jem finds the place of her dreams literally when she peers into the basement flat where a room is being let and remembers a recurring dream shes had since her teens of a mans head viewed through a window. Smith, who owns the flat, and his best friend Ralph (a penniless artist) are renting the spare room in an attempt to break their after-work routine of TV, beer, and a joint before bed. Jem, convinced that one of the inhabitants must be Mr. Right, moves in, and the plot immediately thickens. A scant week passes before the usually sensible young woman beds Smith because he brought her favorite flowers home and helped a bit in the kitchen. The casual sex is fine with Smith; it might make Cheri (who lives above them) jealous and bring his five-year obsession with the willowy blond to fruition. But Cheri is occupied with breaking up just for the challenge of it. Karl and Siobhan, a happy couple who occupy the ground-floor space. Inextricably, though unknowingly interconnected, the six protagonists somersault through a series of misadventures. Ralph, having read Jem's diaries on the sly, is convinced hes her destiny and falls head over heels. Despite the scatterbrained plotting, the author casts a perceptive eye on the difficulty of relationships: her tone is sweet and tragic when delineating Karl and Siobhan, dreamily romantic with Ralph and Jem, and just plain neurotic with regard to the very modern Smith and Cheri. When Ralph is adamantly brushed off by Jem (Smith must be the one!), he spends the next two months painting portraits of her. For the night of his gallery opening, he invites all involved to the party, hoping hell will break loose and the righteous will have their day. Slight, yes, but enjoyable. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Review

...her narrative reads like a more polite version of one of Will Self's novels. -- *The New York Times Book Review*, Barbara Sutton

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Frederick Warren:

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Kermit Diaz:

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