



Lucky Break

Esther Freud

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It is their first day at Drama Arts, and the nervous students huddled in a circle are told in no uncertain terms that here, unlike at any other drama school, they will be taught to Act. To Be. To exist in their own world on the stage. But outside is the real world—a pitiless, alluring place in which each of them in their most fervent dreams hopes to flourish and excel.

Nell, insecure and dumpy, wonders if she will ever be cast as anything other than the maid. She'll never compete, she knows, with the multitude of confident, long-legged beauties thronging the profession, most notably Charlie, whose effortless ascendancy is nothing less than she expects. Meanwhile, Dan, ambitious and serious, has his sights fixed on the role of Hamlet, as well as on fiery, rebellious Jemma.

Over the following decade, these young actors grapple with haphazard tours, illogical auditions, unobtainable agents, deluxe trailers, rocky relationships, and red-carpet premieres. This dazzling new novel from Esther Freud uncovers a world of ruthless ambition, uncertain alliances, and the many-sided holy grail of success.

Lucky Break Details

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Author : Esther Freud

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From Reader Review Lucky Break for online ebook

Simon Lipson says

Just horrible. A tale about a bunch of unlikeable drama students whose stories we pick up at some feted drama school (run by the kind of people who exist only in the minds of artistically bankrupt authors) and follow through to various pointless conclusions. The prose is leaden, riddled with antiquated expressions and cliches ('she bit her lip' is Ms Freud's frequently used phrase to describe someone putting their foot in it - where did she get that from, Enid Blyton?; have you ever bitten your lip other than accidentally when eating a cashew or something?). The characters are dull and shallow and I couldn't have cared less if they'd all rowed out to sea and never come back. I struggled to see the point of any of it. No tension, no drama, no drawing together of storylines, just a deadly, prosaic plod towards...nothing.

I'd like to ask Ms Freud's agent what persuaded him/her to sign her up, and maybe have a word with her publishers too. If this kind of aimless, lustreless drivel can make it through the traditional publishing minefield, is it any wonder that so many interesting, innovative and genuinely amusing authors are forced to take the independent route?

Grim and ghastly. I didn't actually finish it before throwing it in furious despair at a wall. Avoid.

Edan says

This book won't light anyone's world on fire, but it does what it does very well--it's a super fun and readable story about struggling actors, in acting school and beyond. Some of the scenes felt obvious to me--their subtext a bit on-the-nose--but I loved reading this every night, and when I wasn't reading it I found myself worrying about these characters and their careers! Being an actor: it's hard!

The end is dumb and cheesy and could have been SO MUCH BETTER. But, again, I got what I paid for, and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

Mary says

I really liked what there was of this book, but I wanted a lot more. I found it was a bit superficial and glancing. The device of switching the focus between the three main characters seemed to prevent any real depth. I also found Nell's rise to fame a little unbelievable, though I suppose such things do happen.

I wanted much more detail about the awful drama school and more of the other characters. I never really felt like I knew any of the characters well enough and so I couldn't really sympathise with them.

Still, it was a decent read and written well enough.

Melisande says

Je tiens tout d'abord à remercier les éditions Albin Michel de m'avoir permis de lire ce livre. Je dois avouer que ça n'est pas le genre de livre que je lis habituellement (étant davantage dans l'imaginaire ou les thrillers) mais la 4e de couverture de ce livre étant assez intéressante, j'avais bien envie de découvrir ce livre et je dois avouer que je n'ai pas été déçue. C'était un livre intéressant à lire et en même temps de découvrir ce que peut être la vie d'artiste.

Je ne ferai pas de résumé de l'histoire parce que c'est relativement « complexe », que l'on suit différents personnages, sans compter que ça retire de l'intérêt au livre si je dis davantage de choses que ce qui est noté sur la 4e de couverture. Elle est suffisamment explicite pour savoir à quoi s'attendre en lisant ce livre. Néanmoins, je parlerai vite fait de la manière dont il s'agence avant de donner mon avis propre sur ce livre.

Le livre est divisé en 3 parties : 1992-1994 qui correspond à la période où les différents personnages de cette histoire se retrouvent à la Drama Arts à Londres, on voit donc leur « scolarité », on fait leur connaissance et on voit comment cela s'agence entre eux, pendant toute cette période. On voit leur bonheur, et une certaine désillusion lorsque les professeurs les confrontent à la réalité de la vie, s'ils souhaitent vraiment devenir comédien. Ensuite dans la 2e partie : 1995-2000, on voit comment chacun des personnages s'en sort dans leur carrière, etc. et ils vont voir que ça n'est pas toujours facile et enfin la dernière partie se passe entre : 2003-2006, où l'on suit encore un petit groupe des anciens étudiants, avec leur vie, leur carrière, etc.

J'ai bien aimé ce livre, même si ça n'est pas mon genre habituel comme je l'ai dit un peu plus haut, j'ai pris beaucoup de plaisir à le lire et de voir comment une passion, dont les protagonistes ont choisi d'en faire leur métier (être acteur - comédien), peut en même temps être signification de souffrances, de déceptions et désillusion. Le livre est écrit par une ex-comédienne, donc on peut se douter que ce qui est écrit ici, peut être vrai, et être un assemblage de « témoignages », ou de « vécus », que ce soit par elle, ou des connaissances. Donc ça apporte un plus et montre que dans le milieu artistique, ça n'est jamais évident de se faire une place et que seuls quelques « élites » s'en sortent. C'est un monde dur et impitoyable où seuls ceux qui ont une volonté de fer peuvent parvenir à leur fin.

On découvre dans la première partie, une bande assez dynamique et heureux d'être acceptés dans cette grande école, mais dès leur arrivée, leur souhait de gloire et de carrière s'efface peu à peu quand ils se rendent compte de tout ce qu'ils devront apprendre et faire pour être de vrais comédiens et non pas juste des gens qui récitent des textes. Il s'agit de la meilleure école et ils vont devoir vraiment apprendre à être leur personnage et pas seulement à les jouer. Dans cette partie, je m'attendais davantage à voir les gens en cours, etc. mais ça n'est pas le cas, on survole un peu cette partie, en nous montrant de manière plus succincte (après tout c'est sur une période de 2 ans, donc il faut bien faire avancer le temps) et l'on découvre peu à peu ce que chacun va advenir, ceux qui restent et ceux qui devront partir...

Par la suite (dans les parties 2 et 3), on voit moins de personnages, mais un petit « groupe » sélectionné pour voir comment chacun vit sa vie, comment ils s'en sortent, leur déboire dans leur carrière. Et on se rend compte qu'être acteur n'est pas chose aisée car il faut sans cesse appeler les agents (quand ils en ont) pour savoir s'ils vont avoir du travail, etc. et cela se poursuit d'une certaine manière dans la 3e partie, où chacun « vieillissant » se rend compte que tout ça n'était peut-être qu'un rêve qui ne deviendra jamais réalité, ou au contraire, sera un rêve éveillé, mais le tout est de voir à quel prix. Quel prix est-on capable d'accepter pour parvenir à son rêve ?

Ce livre part d'un rêve, de gloire avant de faire confronter les personnages de l'histoire devant la dure réalité

et après, le tout est de voir s'ils sont prêt à en payer le prix. Qu'est-ce qui compte le plus pour eux ? Qu'est-ce qui est le plus important ? L'argent, la carrière ? La famille ? Autant d'éléments qui peuvent être remis en cause et à travers les différents personnages, on découvre le chemin parcouru et d'une certaine manière comment cela va se terminer pour eux et ça n'est pas nécessairement celui qui va s'en sortir au début et avoir « la gloire » qui finira sa vie ainsi.

Ce sont des choses aléatoires, des opportunités qui vont bouleverser d'une manière ou d'une autre chacun des protagonistes et c'est ce que la vie peut nous offrir (quelque soit le domaine) mais c'est d'autant plus vrai dans ce milieu. Ça n'est pas forcément les plus talentueux (ou ceux qui avaient un vrai potentiel) qui vont bien s'en sortir. Les personnages sont assez éclectiques et peu à peu on découvre la vie de chacun et là, on voit et ressent tout ça. Le livre est peut être une fiction, on ne sait pas s'ils sont réels tous ces personnages, néanmoins, on est parfaitement ancré dans la société actuelle (proche du moins), quand on voit toutes les références et que la vie qu'ils mènent doit être certainement vrai pour beaucoup de gens qui souhaitent en faire leur métier.

Etant donné qu'ils viennent tous de la même école, une certaine amitié s'est créée et on retrouve les « autres étudiants » lorsqu'on est centré sur une des personnes. Ça permet de voir le décalage parfois entre deux et de se rendre compte de ce que chacun vit. Leurs relations sont particulières parfois et on découvre peu à peu leur vraie personnalité. Certains sont plus touchants que d'autres, certains évoluent énormément et l'on comprend que vu la vie qu'ils mènent, ils ont forcément dû changer, pour être plus fort et plus préparé à l'échec (qui est là assez souvent).

C'était intéressant de voir ce milieu à travers ces personnages. Un monde beau, plein de féerie et de gloire lorsque tout va bien, mais qui a son lot de sacrifice, ça part impitoyable lorsque ça ne fonctionne pas (le milieu artistique quel qu'il soit est dur, ça n'est pas nouveau). Une lecture bien sympathique, parfait pour se détendre et en même temps en apprendre un peu plus sur le milieu (mais là, attention, on risque d'avoir des désillusions aussi).

Jane says

I have loved Esther Freud's writing from her very first book. I was working in central London when it was published and I can still remember checking the shelves of the nearest branch of Waterstones every day to see if the paperback edition was out yet. *Hideous Kinky*: a semi autobiographical account of two young sisters travelling in Morocco with their hippy mother. It had sounded perfect, and oh it was.

Because you see, Esther Freud drew characters simply but oh so clearly, and pulled me into worlds, just as perfectly realised, that they lived in.

Peerless Flats, another semi autobiographical account, this time of a teenage girl in London, was a little less appealing but it pulled off the same trick. More books followed and there hasn't been one that I haven't liked, but none of them touched me in quite the way that first book did.

But Esther Freud's most recent novel, *Lucky Break*, touched me in a rather different way, maybe a rather more mature way, by simply setting out lives of young people so different from the young woman I was and drawing me into their lives in just the same way.

A different book for a different age. I'm not sure if that's saying exactly what I want to, but I really can't think of a better way than that to explain myself.

Lucky Break opens as students arrive for their first day at a London drama school. Those early days are captured perfectly. The joy at that first dream coming true. The curiosity about the others who have arrived in the same place because they were dreaming that same dream. The excitement at what is ahead. And the fear that they might be one of the ones who falls by the wayside, who isn't quite good enough.

The characters are simply and clearly drawn, and their world is perfectly observed, but that is just the beginning. Three individuals from that big picture become the focus, and Esther Freud follows their stories through the drama school years and the decade that follows.

It's an approach that works well, allowing so many stories to be told through the leads and a fine supporting cast:

- The young actor who works hard, does everything right, but never seems to have that one lucky break.
- The hopeful whose dreams are dashed at the very start.
- The star pupil who can't find that same success in wider world.
- The young actor with looks talent and confidence to whom things come easily.
- The ethnic actor who can only get auditions for stereotypical roles.
- The successful actor who expects the world to move about him ...

Some predictable stories maybe, but they are utterly believable.

And so it is with the incidents along the way:

- An agent who promises to call, but never does.
- Embarrassment at meeting a fellow student reduced to working in a pizza chain.
- A casting couch incident.
- A catastrophic outbreak of acne.
- Misunderstandings over love scenes.

Clichés become clichés for a reason.

Ultimately, the characters and their stories caught me. Because they were simple, clear, and utterly believable. Because they weren't entirely predictable, and because the expected pay-off didn't always come. Because so many details, details to make you laugh, to make you cry, to infuriate you were so perfectly observed.

It was clear from the first page that the author was writing about a world she knew inside-out.

I'm quite deliberately avoiding specifics, because I've read reviews about this book that say far too much about the characters and their stories. And sometimes it's nice to know who you are meeting, but in this case I think it is better to meet the characters without too many expectations and then follow their stories.

And Lucky Break is all about the stories.

It wasn't perfect.

I was a little disappointed that they were in the main career stories. Family lives, love lives, friends not involved somehow in the acting world, were given little time.

The timescale and scope of the book made the story a little episodic. That was inevitable, but sometimes the gaps were in the wrong places, and key-developments were off-stage.

Ultimately though, I kept turning the pages, because I wanted find out what would happen.

And that's the sign of a good story, isn't it?

Literary Chanteuse says

Having at one time chased my own dreams and hoping for my lucky break I could really relate to the characters. In fact I'm sure I've met them at past auditions. It gave a realistic taste of trying to balance between working at your goals and trying to live life. Occasionally they clash.

Carly Thompson says

I would give this 3.5 stars (maybe closer to 4). This was a highly enjoyable novel about the lives of three young British actors from the mid 1990s, when they meet in drama school, through 2006. Charlie is beautiful (she is biracial) but selfish and narcissistic; Nell is plain and lacks confidence but she is a loyal friend; Dan is ambitious and very talented but a less than perfect husband and father. I especially liked the behind the scenes look at the life of working actors--the tedium, the anxiety, the self-doubt, the waiting for a break. I found Nell to be the most sympathetic and interesting of the characters (although I found her happy ending far-fetched) and was less interested in how Dan's professional ambitions clashed with his domestic harmony. I would recommend this for fans of contemporary British fiction and backstage novels.

Fluffychick says

Although I liked it - I didn't love it.

But I did really like these things...

1. the cover!

2. it's beautifully written;

3. it starts off well and brought back vivid memories of the drama students I hung out with when I was at uni. The whole arty, terribly self-conscious, clever-dickiness of them! Bless...but I can say that, as only a real friend would help them learn lines from Ibsen without the aid of alcohol! It also reminded me that the tutors were even more pretentious than the students!

4. I liked the character of Nell and although I thought it pretty obvious that she'd probably be the "success" story, she was interesting and well developed.

So there's lots of things to like and I would certainly say to give it a go. I've never read Esther Freud before, but will look at her other novels. But overall, I just found the whole thing a bit unsatisfactory and superficial. I was expecting more and I felt the ending was just too "fairy tale" in a book that at times was brutally honest about an actor's life.

KOMET says

As someone who is both an avid movie fan and a respecter of those people among us who have opted to pursue acting careers, this is a novel I thoroughly enjoyed reading. "Lucky Break" is largely centered around 3 people --- Nell Gilby, Charlotte ("Charlie") Adedayo-Martin, and Dan Linden --- who first met in London during the early 1990s as drama students at Drama Arts, a school headed by Patrick Bowery, who is an exacting taskmaster and holds in his hands the future of his charges. Drama Arts proves to be a school of hard knocks where illusions are cruelly shattered as each student endeavors in Patrick's words, "to Act. To Be."

For those students who survive the first 2 years at Drama Arts, there is the offer of an additional year, graduation, and prospects for both stage and screen. BUT for those asked to leave after the 2 years, it could either be the end of life as he/she had known it, leaving them utterly adrift for having failed to measure up as would be actors -- OR finding one's way into another line of work. That is, settling for an ordinary existence.

Each chapter of "Lucky Break" gives the reader entree into the lives, loves, and struggles of the 3 main characters as each goes on from Drama Arts [hint: one of the 3 fails to graduate] to finding an agent to help get one's acting career off the ground, taking the plunge into the fickle and ruthless world of stage and screen, and establishing success and longevity in what can be an unforgiving career. It was fascinating to see how, over a 14-year period, the destinies of Nell, Charlie, and Dan were played out. For any reader like me with a curiosity about the lives of people in the acting profession, this novel is a winner.

Juliette says

1 1/2 stars. This book is terrible! It's like an US Weekly that has been turned into a novel about the lamest actors ever. The characters are dull, self-absorbed & trite. I keep hoping Esther Freud wrote this as a joke or maybe intended it to be for middle school girls to read (no offense, middle school girls-I usually like the books you read). Don't waste your time. If you are in the mood for a great book about students, try PREP by Curtis Sittenfeld instead.

Apé says

I love Esther Freud's writing. She's one of these people I can sit down and just read the whole book in one sitting without getting tired. Although this book is charting the lives of wannabe actors over ten years, I think there's a lot in here that most people can relate to. All those hopes and false promises of your teens - you just have to study, get that degree or whatever and you'll walk into an amazing job, never have problems, life will work out perfectly la,la,la.... er no. Not just because life isn't fair, but in your early twenties you're not the finished article and it takes years to figure out who you are and what you're good at. And as for those people who have achieved EVERYTHING by the time they're 22 and make you feel bad... well, either they were liars or they were never destined to be much of a finished article.

It starts off with a load of teenagers (not my favourite type of book!) starting on a three year course of drama studies (she runs screaming from the building in horror). Yes, this is self-absorbed and pretentious at its

worst. They do have possibly the most obnoxious man to grace the pages as the head of a school, who sneers down at literally everything - although I never figured out what was so marvellous about him. And so we are treated to the real world of actors, from drama school through the first ten years of working in pizza shops, being without work for months, auditions, jealousies, insecurities, chasing off dirty old American directors who think they can bully girls desperate to be in the movies into bed, being led into nudity for film and not having the confidence to say no... it's all sorts. Meanwhile they're assuming everyone else has had their lucky break, but really it seems more like random chance in reality.

There are three particular characters from drama school whom we follow onwards. There's beautiful, vain Charlie who gets success straight off, and perhaps too soon for her to manage or appreciate it. There's Nell, who I liked the most, who is perhaps a wee bit of a wallflower, but builds up her career from the bottom, tries all sorts of things and doesn't give up. And there's Dan who lives with his girlfriend from drama school. They have four kids. He pursues the dream and she stays at home and puts her life on hold. She does a degree in Russian, but doesn't get to use that either and basically lives in limbo so he has the freedom to do what he wants to do.

This is fiction, but I understand from the afterword and the fact that Freud herself went to drama school, that it's created from a collection of stories and anecdotes from people who have lived that life.

Blair says

Lucky Break tells the story of a group of drama students. Starting with their first day at the prestigious Drama Arts college, the book follows the group for a period of 14 years - from 1992 to 2006 - and as it does so the focus narrows to three individuals. Nell, who emerges as the protagonist, is an average-looking, uncertain girl who harbours a burning passion to 'make it' but comes up against seemingly relentless barriers; Dan is a talented and determined actor who finds his career options hampered by the financial and emotional strain of an early marriage and four young children; Charlie is both stunning and gifted, but after some early success she becomes totally obsessed with the idea that she is losing her looks. The chapters alternate between characters - although Nell (who for some reason I couldn't stop picturing as Kate Winslet) receives a little more attention than the others - and move through the years, charting the actors' early struggles, successes, failures, and difficulties in reconciling their 'real' lives with their strange, difficult, and all-consuming profession.

The style is sparse, skipping over years of the characters' lives with only the scantest detail, but I found it oddly addictive. However, the lack of detail was a particular problem at the beginning, when the students of Drama Arts were first being introduced; I found it difficult to keep track of who everyone was and this meant there was little emotional impact when, for instance, (view spoiler) - I was too busy trying to remember who these people actually were. Whole relationships happen off the page, and we're given little glimpses of something really significant - the start of an affair (or is it?) - and then the narrative switches back to another character and the thread is lost. I couldn't figure out whether this was a great narrative device (is it better that we get to imagine our own versions of the characters' lives?) or just a frustrating cop-out. David Nicholls' *One Day*, despite being a more lightweight novel, did this much better, skipping significant periods in the characters' lives while still managing to imbue them with warmth and humanity. In contrast, I always felt like Nell, Dan and Charlie were kept at arm's length from the reader.

I often found myself thinking the description was clumsy, the characterisation obvious, the references to the 'outside world' (eg a couple of brief mentions of New Labour) desultory, what happened too predictable - but

I kept coming back to the book, even when the only way I could read it was on the tiny screen of my iPhone, and was constantly surprised at how quickly I was flying through it. I do think Freud did a very good job of relating how hard and thankless acting really is; I don't know anything about it, of course, so for all I know the whole thing might be completely inaccurate, but I often felt like the book was really shining a light into the dark corners of a lifestyle regarded by most as seductive and glitzy. Though the characters all attained some success and glamour at one point or another, I never envied them. Indeed, Freud's portrayal of the actors' constant nerves on, off and backstage, before, during and after scenes, made it seem like my worst nightmare more than anything.

Still, given that Freud is a respected author who has written six or seven other novels, and that my desire to read this book was sparked by rave reviews in the Observer, Guardian and Telegraph, the style is remarkably amateurish. Something that struck me about the writing was that I honestly couldn't see any great difference between this and authors like, for example, Erin Kelly and Kate Morton, who'd be unlikely to be thought of as literary or to get much of a mention in the broadsheet review sections. This doesn't mean I thought the book was badly written - just that I expected something more impressive from such a lauded writer. If I hadn't known who wrote this, I definitely would have guessed it was a youthful debut penned by someone who'd been an aspiring actor for a couple of years.

I enjoyed reading *Lucky Break*, but I doubt it'll leave any great impression on me. A few hours after finishing the book, I'm already struggling to remember much about the characters. I often read popular chart fiction titles and am pleasantly surprised when they turn out to have more substance than I expected; this was the opposite - a supposedly literary novel, garlanded with praise by the critics, that was really rather light and fluffy. One to take on a lazy beach holiday or read on a train journey.

Ana says

I had high hopes for this book because of the theme (young actors meet at super intense british theater school) but the author has no idea how to properly build characters we care about. Her pacing is beyond awkward- we leap from time period to time period with little transition. She may be trying to communicate via 'small scenes' but it simply does not hang together as a coherent whole. Some of the characters are just so blank that I could not remember them halfway through the book. A very big miss. The dialogue is also confusing and dull.

Francesca says

I read this book for a group and I've quite enjoyed it. Interesting portrait of actors' life with the hopes, worries, disillusionment and luck.

Hanneke says

I did not care at all for this book, its characters or its story. If Esther Freud does not improve, I will stop reading her altogether which is a pity because I liked 'Hideous Kinky' immensely and I had high hopes for her next novels. While most of her successive books were slightly entertaining, this one turned out to be irritating. So sorry, Esther, I was fully prepared to like it!

