



White Elephant

Julie Langsdorf

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The White Elephant looms large over the quaint suburban town of Willard Park: a gaudy, newly constructed behemoth of a home, it soars over the neighborhood, dwarfing the houses that surround it. When owner Nick Cox cuts down Allison and Ted Millers' precious red maple—in an effort to make his unsightly property more appealing to buyers—their once serene town becomes a battleground.

While tensions between Ted and Nick escalate, other dysfunctions abound: Allison finds herself compulsively drawn to the man who is threatening to upend her quietly organized life. A lawyer with a pot habit and a serious mid-life crisis skirts his responsibilities. And in a quest for popularity, a teenage girl gets caught up in a not-so-harmless prank. Newcomers and longtime residents alike begin to clash in conflicting pursuits of the American Dream, with trees mysteriously uprooted, fires set, fingers pointed, and lines drawn.

White Elephant is an uproarious, tangled-web tale of neighbor hating neighbor (and neighbor falling head over heels for neighbor). Soon, peaceful Willard Park becomes a tinder box with nowhere to go but up in flames.

White Elephant Details

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Author : Julie Langsdorf

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From Reader Review White Elephant for online ebook

Cari says

Julie Langsdorf's debut novel, WHITE ELEPHANT, is a visual, rich description of a small town divided. While a calming, beautifully-written, relaxed read, the book doesn't shy from important subjects. The characters are fully developed, leaving the reader "rooting" for every character as she or he struggles within the main theme of the book as well as those outside of the theme -- that is, dealing with their own, internal demons. Langsdorf is a sharp observer of human nature. This is the kind of read, about a small, quirky town, that allows a break from larger, often explosive issues, that loom in our every day realities.

Whitney Scharer says

What a terrific book! I loved this portrait of a seemingly perfect small town that descends into chaos when a hideously large house (Dubbed the "White Elephant" by other residents) is erected by a new builder. The plot is absorbing and moves along briskly, but what makes this book so wonderful is the rich portrait of all the characters. Whether we like them or not, we sympathize with all of them--and even find ourselves rooting for them even if we don't agree with their choices. A funny and wise portrait of a modern American suburb and the desires that draw people together--and tear them apart.

Colleen McDonough says

This is an incredibly well-written, thought out novel. I really loved reading it, and will be recommending it to anyone who asks for a new book to read!

Ericka Seidemann says

Perfect for fans of Tom Perrotta and Jonathan Tropper, *White Elephant* is an impressive debut that I binge-read in a couple of days. These neighbors are so dysfunctional, and yet, so relatable. I wanted to simultaneously hug and yell at every character in this book.

Charming 100-year-old Sears homes, a children's library, the local coffee shop where everyone has their own mug . . . an idyllic bedroom community for upper-middle class families. All is perfect in Willard Park, until newcomer architect Nick Cox moves in and begins building massive mansions that loom over the cozy smaller houses. His neighbor Ted is at first moved to peaceful protest, but Willard Park is a crucible, boiling everyone's fears and insecurities into an explosion.

White Elephant is packed with flawed characters that are entertaining and sympathetic (well, most of them anyway). There's Ted, the do-gooder who just wants his small town back; his wife, Allison, stifled in her sexless marriage and tempted by other options; their daughter Jillian, who just wants to be noticed; their neighbors, the volatile Nick and his trophy wife, Kaye, who is not as vapid as she appears; and new to the neighborhood, the pothead lawyer Grant and his wife Suzanne, who is coming to realize her marriage is

going up in smoke.

Animosity simmers until Nick Cox cuts down the maple tree that Ted planted when his daughter was born. The vitriol escalates exponentially, and the residents of Willard Park start behaving in ways they never deemed possible.

This book is quite a page-turner, and each chapter introduces more conflict. It's hilarious and heartbreaking. Highly recommended.

Many thanks to HarperCollins and Ecco Press for the advance copy in exchange for my review.

Julia Phillips says

Sharp, sly, and laugh-out-loud funny, this novel follows three families in a DC suburb as their parents, children, and notions of home come into conflict. Julie Langsdorf's descriptions of the anxieties of the wealthy – what their neighbors are up to, how their marriages appear from the outside, whether their houses are appreciating in value – are so good, claustrophobically good, making you prickle with their tension as you read. You can feel Langsdorf's love for every character even as you relish her honesty about them. Wonderful.

Kate Hope says

In the tradition of great stories about distinctive houses (Mansfield Park, Bleak House, I Capture the Castle) is the delicious debut *White Elephant*. The book invites us into the small suburban community of Willard Park and the complex emotional allegiances of its inhabitants. This place and these people are so familiar, and yet they are completely engaging. The author's voice is sharp—its depiction of everyday domestic life reminds me at times of Austen—but also tender. We see these characters' insecurities and petty choices and misdirected bravado, and we love them anyway. In that sense the book reminds me most of Tom Perrotta. Readers that love his sweet/sharp depiction of suburban life will love *White Elephant*. I was sad to let these characters go. An entirely satisfying book. Highly recommend. Out March 26, 2019!

Anamaria Cole says

White Elephant is a great story, with lots of cozily familiar situations and interesting characters you cannot help but to love and hate. The big new house in town, also known as 'the white elephant', raises havoc in a quaint town already simmering with fraught situations. The characters are well-developed and you'll find yourself relating to them in different ways. Slowly but surely, the author manages to beautifully weave all the stories together into a poignant finale. *White Elephant* is a book that you won't want to put down. I highly recommend it.

Angie Kim says

Wow! What an amazing lens into a supposedly “idyllic” suburban DC community. It’s so rich, weaving together so many threads, each unique and fresh in its own way. On the one hand, it’s a witty and satirical commentary on American suburbia, and at the same time, there’s a lot of insight about what it means to be a mother/wife and what the ramifications are for women’s own individual needs and desires. The mix is fascinating, and the novel as a whole is sharp, warm, and downright hilarious.

Probably my favorite aspect of *WHITE ELEPHANT* is the incredible voice. Clever, funny, witty—every sentence from beginning to end was a pure pleasure to read. I almost didn’t even care what was happening from a plot perspective because the narrative asides were so entertaining. The story is told from multiple points of view with an intimacy that allows the readers to get to know the all-too-human motivations and emotions of the characters. The result: complex, vividly-drawn characters who earn our sympathy and understanding.

I’m also in awe over the brilliant social commentary this novel provides. There is so much lurking just beneath the (very funny) surface. Gentrification is at the core of this story, with a few families bickering over trees and size/style of their neighboring houses, with each side gaining allies and enemies until the whole (previously-)charming town devolves into war mode. But just as important are the issues about classism, about marriage and fidelity, about parenting, and about the social politics of close-knit communities of mothers. And that ending! I won’t say much, for fear of spoiling it, but I found it very emotionally satisfying.

In short, I loved this novel, and I can’t believe that this is Julie Langsdorf’s debut novel. I would happily read anything this author writes. If you like Liane Moriarty, you will love this novel. Most strongly recommended!

Lydia says

A fast-paced, fun novel that I really got into and couldn’t put down!

Jean says

I was disappointed with this one. With blurbs from power authors Meg Wolitzer and Cynthia Sweeney, I expected a whole lot more than I got.

Megan Collins says

To put it as succinctly as possible, I LOVED this book.

With *WHITE ELEPHANT*, Julie Langsdorf perfectly captures life in the suburbs--the tension and competition between neighbors, the comfort of cozy familiar spots, the dreams that get put on hold to keep things afloat, and the sense of community that can be both stifling and lifesaving.

The characters in this novel were all incredibly rich, written with so much depth and empathy that I often found myself not only sympathizing, but actually falling in love, with characters that I had previously written off as vapid or villainous.

The story is deeply compelling, full of brutal truths and immense warmth. Funny and clever, moving and heartfelt, this novel is perfect for book clubs, college syllabi, or just any time you're in need of a terrific story.

Nancy says

White Elephant is a fun story filled with interesting people. I saw a little of myself in each character. It's a story about a nice, quiet little neighborhood until you peek under the nice, quiet little covers. A monster house is being built, trees are downed and neighbors don't exactly see eye to eye about most of it. The interaction between all of them could be any neighborhood anywhere.

Andrea Bartz says

A warm, witty, and at times laugh-out-loud funny read about suburban ennui and what it means to accept your loves ones (and yourself!) for who they are, not who you want them to be. Langsdorf has a knack for capturing the calisthenics we do in our heads every day as we struggle to seem like we have it all together. She's also a beautiful writer; WHITE ELEPHANT is packed with rich descriptions, snappy dialogue, and impressively complex characters—not easy to pull off with a large ensemble cast. I received an ARC from the publisher and I'll be recommending this like crazy when it's out.

Michael Durbin says

Vivid and authentic setting, rich characters of every stripe, delightful language, and tight storylines that keep you intrigued until the very end. What more could you want in a novel? White Elephant is a great read.

Natalie Sheffo says

Loved this book! The writing is clever and the characters are dynamic and entertaining. This is a wonderful debut novel, and I can't wait to read more by the author in the future!
