



Invitation to the Waltz

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A diary for her innermost thoughts, a china ornament, a ten-shilling note, and a roll of flame-coloured silk for her first evening dress: these are the gifts Olivia Curtis receives for her seventeenth birthday. She anticipates her first dance, the greatest yet most terrifying event of her restricted social life, with tremulous uncertainty and excitement. For her pretty, charming elder sister Kate, the dance is certain to be a triumph, but what will it be for shy, awkward Olivia?

Exploring the daydreams and miseries attendant upon even the most innocent of social events, Rosamond Lehmann perfectly captures the emotions of a girl standing poised on the threshold of womanhood.

Invitation to the Waltz Details

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From Reader Review Invitation to the Waltz for online ebook

Ally says

A fairly simple and charming tale of a young girl on the occasion of her 17th Birthday and of the preparations for her first dance.

The writing is beautiful and, although I thought it was going to be a difficult read at first, I soon got into the rhythm. It's told from the perspective of the main character Olivia and occasionally that of her sister Kate. As we hear her thoughts, opinions and insecurities we can't help but remember our own experiences at that age. The stream of consciousness style is not impenetrable here because it's used to describe some very human and relatable experiences.

There are several wonderful character sketches of the people that Olivia encounters, from the children of the sweep, the unmarried dressmaker and the lace saleswoman, to the retired Major from India and the lonely widower, to the blind chicken farmer and the disappointing Curate, from the angry aesthete, to the drunken soldier and on to the kind and sophisticated Rollo. These encounters bring real depth to the tale by exploring class issues, social injustices and the effects of the recent war on all aspects of society.

A very enjoyable read that I wouldn't hesitate to recommend to others. I'm now really looking forward to reading the sequel, which picks up with these characters after a 10 year interval - 'The Weather in the Streets'.

Diane Barnes says

This was a lovely little novel about a seventeen year old girl and her first dance. We've all been there; the fear that she'll be a wallflower, the awkwardness of making small talk, the dress that's not as nice as she had imagined, trying to figure out how to navigate the adult world. The action takes place in 1920, but seems very contemporary. Some things never change. The author does a wonderful job of putting you inside Olivia's mind and emotions.

Ali says

Upon first reading Invitation to the Waltz I thought it was a lively charming novel, which it is. This re-read of it however, has given me the chance to appreciate just how very good it is. First published in 1932, but set around 1920 Invitation to the Waltz is the story of a dance, seventeen year old Olivia's first ever, which she will attend with her beautiful older sister Kate. On the surface there isn't much to the story at all. Olivia wakes to her seventeenth birthday, is given some marvellous scarlet fabric to have a dress made for the coming ball, a ten shilling note, a diary and an ugly ornament from her sweet little brother. Then there are the days leading up to the dance, the dress which must be made and the anticipated arrival of Reggie who will accompany them to the dance, and provide a possibly much needed partner for Olivia. Olivia and Kate's family comprises a socially aware mother an elderly father, odd Uncle Oswald, and endearingly sweet 7-year-old brother James. Olivia is a wonderful character – brought up to be polite, she is terrified of hurting

people's feeling, she is so overly conscious of herself as we so often are at that age – that her trials and agonies could belong to almost any young girl – even today.

"I want to do something absolutely different, or perhaps nothing at all: just stay where I am, in my home, and absorb each hour, each day, and be alone; and read and think; and walk about the garden in the night; and wait, wait..."

Then comes the evening of the party and the awful, exciting anticipation, of a longed for event. The flame coloured fabric that Olivia is given for her birthday has been made into a dress by local seamstress Miss Robinson, another wonderful creation from Rosamond Lehmann, as we are allowed a poignant glimpse of this sad woman's life, her disappointments and inadequacies. The dress surprisingly not tried on in its finished form until the evening itself is inevitably a disappointment. The evening of the dance takes up three-quarters of the book with the people Olivia and Kate meet - especially Olivia, the conversations they have, and the feelings they awake in her. Olivia meets some interesting characters at the dance – a young blind man, a rather miserable poet as well as the son of the household Rollo Spencer.

"I've had a lot really, one way and another. What was it that, at last, had made almost a richness? Curious fragments odd and ends of looks, speeches...Nothing for myself really. Rollo leaving me to go to Nicola. Rollo and his father smiling at one another. Peter crying, saying "are you my friend?" Kate looking so happy...Waltzing with Timmy. Marigold flying downstairs to him. Yes, I can say I've enjoyed myself."

The dance held for the effervescent Marigold Spencer – is both an excitement and an agony for Kate and Olivia. They just daughters of a middle-class businessman, while aristocratic Marigold and Rollo Spencer are from an altogether different world. A world of glamour, house parties, trips to London, fast cars and hunting. As they leave childhood behind them, they will inevitably become more separate from the glorious beings from the big house who they were once more equal to, as children. Rosamond Lehmann portrays the differences of class, and social position brilliantly in this novel. From the sad thirty-year-old dressmaker, aware she was too good to marry a bricklayer, left on the shelf and reduced to a life of tedium and ill health. To the sweep's bedraggled little children, to the selfish, vain young things who arrive for the party, she has a brilliantly observing eye.

Misha Mathew says

What a delightful read! I came across this book due to comparisons with *I Capture the Castle*, another wonderful coming-of-age book and a favorite of mine.

Invitation to the Waltz is told from the POV of Olivia, 17 year old protagonist, who has been invited to her first dance. The first half covers the morning of her birthday, and the preparations for the dance. The second half is the dance itself. This book is definitely not for those who like plot-driven, action-packed or fast-paced novels. In fact, plot-wise hardly anything happens. So why the 5 stars? The characters, that's why. They are the most vibrant and memorable set of characters I have come across in any book. Though this book is mostly from Olivia's POV, we are also given a glimpse into Kate's - Olivia's beautiful older sister - POV as well. I loved Olivia! Overshadowed by her sister, Olivia often lacks confidence, is sometimes naive, and sometimes extraordinarily mature for her age. The authors gives her readers a chance to see the world from

Olivia's eyes. We experience her hopes, fears, sadness. I loved how Olivia is so awkward and scared about her first dance. She is often childish and then admonishes herself for being so. There are no end to the humourous moments. The experiences of our lovable heroine before and after the dance, and her often awkward encounters with different people are laced with hilarious moments. The author's beautiful prose makes these encounters and the people come alive.

The best part of the book is the dance itself. We get to see each new acquaintance through Olivia's eyes. Each meeting is described in detail, and each person leaves something to ponder upon, both for Olivia as well as the readers. Maurice, who is so kind; Archie, who is so charming yet snubs her; Peter, the overly sensitive poet; the handsome, enigmatic Rollo Spencer and so on. At the end of the dance, Olivia looks upon everything with a new maturity and insight. The naive young girl grows up.

The ending is a hopeful yet sad one, as Olivia realizes that one dance has changed everthing. Kate is no longer the same, and neither is she. One night has changed the dynamics of their relationship completely.

Invitation to the Waltz is a deeply satisfying read, recommended for fans of Jane Austen, Dodie Smith and Nancy Mitford.

Ellen says

I was interested in reading "Invitation to the Waltz", by Rosamund Lehmann, primarily because of Lehmann's association with the Bloomsbury Group through her brother, John Lehmann, who worked for the Woolfs in their publishing endeavor, the Hogarth Press. What I found is that Rosamund Lehmann has been influenced by Virginia Woolf's writing concepts, and the stream-of-consciousness method.

The entire book takes place during one day, similar to "Mrs. Dalloway". The two main characters, Kate and Olivia Curtis, are going to attend a ball; it's the first dance that Olivia, the younger sister has ever attended, and she in particular is very excited about going. The two sisters are quite different from one another - Kate is the romantic, who rather reminds me of Clarissa Dalloway herself. Olivia is the more introspective of the two, more inwardly directed and self-analytical. As the dance itself is depicted the girls have very different experiences, with Olivia, the more sensitive of the two, ending up dancing with men who might be considered "damaged" - one blinded during the war, an old man who is lonely because his wife has died, and an "aesthete" who hates being at the dance and lets everyone know about it. Lehmann's style is lovely, and her phrasing is delicious. She is able to present both the aristocracy and the middle class nicely.

In the end, I can't give this book more than a three-star rating, although I did enjoy reading it very much. I'd recommend this one for young women and perhaps even girls who enjoy books written in an old-fashioned style, but who won't take the book at face value. It's also an interesting read for people interested in Virginia Woolf and her perspectives on interiority and her ability to have different narrators present their own points of view uncluttered by the presence of an "all-knowing" narrator. Good book, indeed.

Dolors says

The introduction of a young lady in the London Society.
And the ending of her innocence and happiness.

Kansas says

El baile en si mismo, es el mundo que espera a Olivia, a punto de dejar la adolescencia. La inmersión de Olivia en este su primer baile, las ansiedades, la anticipación y la excitación, y la gente que irá conociendo en esta noche, realmente la ayudará a conocerse mejor a sí misma y a desenvolverse en ese tan cercano mundo adulto al que está a punto de adentrarse esta chica de 17 años. Olivia es consciente por primera vez de la artificiosidad de ciertas reuniones sociales donde se hacen más relevantes que nunca las diferencias de clases, los defectos y las virtudes, y las presiones, y al mismo tiempo, sabe reconocer el momento y/o instante auténtico que se puede producir entre tanta "postureo". El baile es el simbolo de esa nueva vida, la primera mirada que tiene de ese mundo todavía desconocido, no tan comodo ni tan protegido, pero esperanzador para una mente curiosa como la de ella. Una novela de iniciación fantástica, Rosamond Lehmann es otra escritora invisible que ya está en mi punto de mira.

Jonathan says

I loved this. I think, perhaps, one of the main reasons was because of the real sense of affection I felt that the author had for this wonderfully ordinary 17 year old girl. Her interior life has value and richness. Her experiences, her thoughts, her fears, are all legitimate subjects for a novel. Yes we are meant to laugh at her, but there is no meanness, no spite, no superiority - instead there is warmth and compassion. It is also probably the closest I will ever come to knowing what it was like to be such a girl in 1920. My god it is stressful having an empty dance program with 23 dances to try and fill up with boys names....

Katie says

Rosamond Lehman makes me realise how much Virginia Woolf had to say. How courageously she plumbed the depths of the human soul. Because Lehman whose style echoes Woolf's and would have been impossible without Woolf as a mentor, can write beautifully but operates on an altogether more superficial level to Woolf. Not that this observation is meant to belittle Lehman's talent; just put it into perspective. There's a lovely deft sketchiness to Lehman's style but it's like watercolour in contrast to Woolf's grounded pigments.

Most of this novel takes place at the waltz of the title and Lehman does a fabulous job of capturing the nuances of aspiration and insecurity, of competitiveness and kinship, of flight and suffocation in her young heroine, Olivia. As in Mrs Dalloway, the shadow of the war is present, stifling some of the bright light of the dance as Olivia meets a succession of men each of whom offers some kind of ghostly path into the future. You could though say that Lehman goes no further than the reflections on the water as beautifully and insightfully as she paints them, whereas Woolf goes under the water and brings forth a whole new underlife.

Kathryn says

The moment I turned the last page, I exclaimed, "Wow." It's very difficult for me to articulate why I find this novel so enchanting and endearing. I think that as a 17-year old, I was a lot like the protagonist, Olivia, and the turning point of my teenage years, the moment when everything changed, also coincided with a dance. And much like her, I was sensitive, overly empathetic, and disliked most things aside from the 19th-century novel. Like her, I remembered and internalized all my interactions with people, but I would fade away from their memories the moment I stepped away. I fancied myself a writer at that age, but all I thought while reading this novel was that THIS was what my journal would have ideally been like had I been a capable and more talented writer.

Livinginthecastle says

I wasn't too fussed about the over convoluted descriptions of nature, but Olivia's dancing partners and her conversations with them were spot on. Very funny, sweet book about growing up and how at seventeen everything feels so serious and the future is a terrifying thing. I especially liked the talk with her Uncle suggesting she won't feel comfortable with herself until she's about 30, and Olivia is horrified.

Margaret says

This was the first Lehmann I read, and it's still probably my favorite. It's a simple snapshot of a teenage girl getting ready for and going to her first dance. Nothing momentous happens, but it's not meant to; it's just a beautifully written, sympathetically perceived portrait of its heroine, Olivia, and a short span in her life.

Lottekind says

3,5 - 4

Bettie? says

Description: *A diary for her innermost thoughts, a china ornament, a ten-shilling note, and a roll of flame-coloured silk for her first evening dress—these are the gifts Olivia Curtis receives for her 17th birthday. She anticipates her first dance, the greatest yet most terrifying event of her restricted social life, with tremulous uncertainty and excitement. For her pretty, charming elder sister Kate, the dance is certain to be a triumph, but what will it be for shy, awkward Olivia? Exploring the daydreams and miseries attendant upon even the most innocent of social events, Rosamond Lehmann perfectly captures the emotions of a girl standing poised on the threshold of womanhood*

Opening: **The village, in the hollow below the house, is picturesque, unhygienic: it has more**

atmosphere than form, than out line: huddled shapes of soft red brick sag towards gardens massed with sunflowers, Canterbury bells, sweet williams.

Sometimes it is perfect to hunker down into the flannelette-esque comfort of a plotless prose that displays such beauty.

**'Oh nature, Oh nature, with all thy powers
What dost thou do through the long winter hours?
I love thee, oh nature, so sweet and so good,
But where does thou get thy winter food?'**

NB I read to my dog and she particularly liked my rendition of the little Wainwrights chorusing 'Yaas'. Hilarious.

3* Invitation to the Waltz
CR The Weather in the Streets

3* Dusty Answer
4* The Echoing Grove

Mariel says

I think I loved Invitation to the Waltz a little bit. I have a feeling about it that it could grow into my memory as a fonder experience. Sweet and sad. I'll sigh when spotting it on my bookshelf (it is still on my bedside table. I'm reluctant to let go of the evening just yet). It's what people mean when they describe an experience as bittersweet, probably. I don't know if I could trust a memory as real unless its edges were sharp. "Did I built it into something too perfect?" If you're like me and find it difficult to enjoy anything without feeling sad for the inevitable moment of it ending you'll probably like this curious nostalgic feeling of a seventeen year old girl's first encounter with, well, looking around at other people (and maybe trying to avoid the meeting of the eyes in the looking around) to see if someone else might get the 'If you're like me...' feeling. It might be like reading a book and writing the goodreads review of it in your head while you read feeling. Olivia does that before, during and after her dance. They say not to look at your feet while you dance.

Lehmann's prose style is a little like looking at your feet when you dance. She's moving. There are steps, like doing someone else's made up dance (I have used this analogy before, probably. When you rehearse and then on the day of you know the steps and forget and you're just dancing), and yet it's you moving. I like the way she moves. At first I wasn't so sure. Too many descriptions of outfits, the sister Kate was uninteresting to me in her predetermined romance that pretty people in young people's novels can have. I was suspicious that it would be another same old story I've read before. Yet it's unique like some dance that anyone could dance because of the deliberation of the steps. (Enough, Mariel.) Olivia is hopeful, out of place, uncomfortable in her own skin. It's the good kind of painful because you can like someone else for having those qualities that you were miserable yourself having. Anyone could say awkward teen, stiff upper lip English people, catty debutantes, et all, and yet Lehmann writes it as just skin to be worn and seen through if you will. The interest for me is in the will.

'Invitation' is a little awkward, even shy. I'm hooked on its arm and led into the country dance (it's really a dance this time!) that's something a great deal more than a country dance because it has been thought so much of. It's about the fit. The fit is less because it has been thought so much (less) of. Lehmann did something brilliant here. It's like wanting to be aware and utterly without the background to place others in. It is like being on someone else's arm in a room. Their shelter is also the shadow for you to stand in, if you do not know your own background (sharp edges and blurry middles. Or is it the other way around?). Olivia is a seventeen year old girl who stops to notice how she breathes. Do you ever stop and pay attention to your own breathing and after a while it feels like you might forget how if you can't stop paying attention to your own breathing? What if you also pay attention to how other people breathe and, wish as you might, you are not in sync. The arm you are on yanks as much as it can pull. It feels good when you're pulled so that you don't think about it.

The word suspicious is used a lot. What other people might mean, if you could read behind their intentions. If you could pull back the curtain of the mask. It's about the hope that there might be nothing more behind that background than the nice face it puts on. It's about when you might pull back on the arm. It's about feeling like there could be some imagination about that background and others fitting into it. 'Waltz' is bittersweet because I'm getting pulled too. I don't know if Olivia is going to remember to breathe. I forget when she forgets and suspect when she suspects. I don't know more about these people than she does. It's pretty much the perfect look into how a shy person forgets how to judge because she is too afraid of being judged herself.

I found out about *Invitation to the Waltz* (and it's sequel. I'm going to read that soon. I'm looking forward to it as a special treat for the Christmas break) when looking for readalikes of the favorites of my heart books. It was recommended for fans of Elizabeth Bowen's *The Death of the Heart* (my favorite book). It could have easily have been one of my *I Capture the Castle* readalikes of the summer of 2011, as well. This is one of my most cherished kinds of stories. How do you keep the hope alive about what is going on in all of those other people's heads? The studying/living/breaking one's own heart story. I think that I read them as a reminder that it comes out of the hope as much as suspicion. I want to believe that some part behind my own mask has wheel cogs turning to wonder about those Olivias.

"They were so kind. This was what real people were like after all, just as she had always imagined; not sinister, inexplicable, but friendly and simple, accepting one pleasantly, with humour but without malice, without condescension, criticism or caresses. How extraordinary to be here with them; from being outcast, flung beyond the furthest rim, to have penetrated suddenly to the innermost core of the house, to be in their home. The dancing, the people beyond were nothing, a froth on the surface, soon to be blown away."

And yet I felt so lonely for Olivia in the end. The dance is over and all of those people she met (some were out right horrors) are trying to keep a softer shape in her mind. I felt like she was losing those real edges and it was too sweet that she should trust. What if her Uncle Oswald is right that if she doesn't decide what the right way to fit is that someone else will decide for her. What if they don't stand beside with a sympathetic expression as Olivia does? What if she meets too many people who don't make the same concern and the wonder is gone and everyone seems the same old story that only some people get to have in novels? (I'd tell her to read better novels. They have great people.) What if those people weren't worth bothering about? Is it enough to do it to have better edges? I don't know... More books.

Susan Kavanagh says

My first foray into the work of Rosalind Lehmann will not be my last. Lehmann presents a beguiling story of

a week in the life of a young woman that includes her birthday and an important dance. Within this tight structure, the author develops interesting characters, explores issues of class and describes English country society between the wars. All the blogs were right--this is a terrific novel.

Denis says

What could have been, with a less talented and sharp writer, a shallow, sentimental, soapy romance novel, becomes with the great Rosamond Lehmann a masterful exploration of adolescent angst and dreams, and one of the most delightful evocation, not only of a young girl's psyche, but also of a whole British social class at a certain time of its history. As usual, Lehmann approaches her characters with tenderness and compassion, but also with great realism and depth, and not, sometimes, without a little bit of welcome cruelty: this, helped by her superb writing skills, transforms a charming little story about a teenage girl on the threshold of adulthood into one of the most delicate, penetrating, and subtly subversive depiction of a very complex age (which is, too often in literature, burdened by clichés.) If the setting can seem to the contemporary reader dated, in a cute and nostalgic way, there's something very modern in the way the heroine, Olivia, is analyzed and presented. Maybe it's the intelligence with which Lehmann deciphers what goes on in her young character's brain. Maybe, too, it's the way she writes, her elegant, beautiful prose that few female writers today can equal. But the result is, beneath the sweetly romantic surface, striking and bolder than one may think.

Gitte says

Living is going on on the other side of the wall, but I've left it. I don't want it. I hate it; it hates and rejects me. I forget and am forgotten. I'm nothing.

The Beginning: *The village, in the hollow below the house, is picturesque, unhygienic.*

Olivia Curtis is shy and sensitive; her sister Kate is beautiful and popular. Olivia reads books and writes poetry, Kate is social and outgoing. They're both invited to a ball and we follow their expectations and feelings towards their peers – potential dancing partners in particular. I've always been drawn to this type of story. Over the years, I've learned to act like a Kate, but deep down inside I have an Olivia – and I treasure her.

It was the beginning of the mood that led to wanting to write poetry. Veils of illusion seemed to float over the familiar scene, half-hiding, half-revealing it under an eternal aspect. It looked like the picture of the village, not like itself.

I was, however, slightly disappointed by this one. I kept thinking 'If only this story was written by Tove Ditlevsen'. She would have let us under the characters' skin in ways Rosamond Lehmann only tries to do. Even though her writing is beautiful, she never really takes us there, right to the centre of our heroine's soul.

Some time later, I'll think about this. It will seem important, extraordinary, upsetting. No time now. I'm going to a dance. Let's forget it.

Bethany says

I actually felt sad when this book ended. It went too swiftly! I felt downhearted that I had to leave dear Olivia (and Kate) after knowing them for only a short while. Thank goodness there is a sequel or else I would feel much sadder than I do now.

Rosamond Lehmann = majorly talented author. I am convinced she could turn a story about watching paint dry into a compelling and beautiful read.

Kirsty Darbyshire says

This kept reminding me of a girls school story. It was written in 1932 and even now I've probably read more school stories from that era than I have adult literature; and the central character is seventeen year old Olivia who is more-or-less the kind of upper middle class nice girl who might have turned up at the Chalet School or its ilk.

It was just the same turns of phrase and atmosphere that linked this book to my childhood reading though, this is a more honest look at a young woman. The story revolves around the first dance Olivia attends as an adult - covering the short time frame between sorting out the dress and worrying about being in her elder sister Kate's shadow and a long look at the strange (to both Olivia and I) manners of the dance.

I enjoyed this book in itself, but I'm looking forward to reading the sequel to it, where I believe Olivia is somewhat older and more worldly wise, more.
