



The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae

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Ailsa Rae is learning how to live.

She's only a few months past the heart transplant that - just in time - saved her life. Life should be a joyful adventure. But . . .

Her relationship with her mother is at breaking point.

She knows she needs to find her father.

She's missed so much that her friends have left her behind.

She's felt so helpless for so long that she's let polls on her blog make her decisions for her. And now she barely knows where to start on her own.

And then there's Lennox. Her best friend and one time lover. He was sick too. He didn't make it. And now she's supposed to face all of this without him.

But her new heart is a bold heart.

She just needs to learn to listen to it . . .

The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae Details

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Author : Stephanie Butland

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From Reader Review The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae for online ebook

Marjorie says

This is a bit of a hit and miss novel and, if I'm being honest, I found that it did actually miss more than it hit. The problem lies in the fact that when it hits it does so wonderfully well and you just want it to keep going and going in that vein. sadly, you do get let down time and time again. In fact I very nearly gave in at the 80-odd page mark as it was all rather ploddy and I couldn't see where it was going. Fortunately another 20 or so pages in and I was rewarded for my perseverance and started to actually enjoy this rather quirky little tale. So, only quarter of a book for it to grab me.

Ailsa herself is quite a charming character, she took me a while to warm to but I did end up rooting for her. She is selfish and quite childlike but after spending 28 years at the mercy of her failing heart this is understandable. I loved her forays in to becoming an adult but felt like whispering her ear - no-one ever really grows up, not if you do it right.

I loved the build up to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (almost as much as I loved the fact the author got the name right - one of my particular bugbears is calling it the Edinburgh Fringe Festival). This is likely coloured by the fact Ailsa is learning to Tango and that has to be simply the greatest ballroom dance ever - even if the author did confuse Ballroom Tango and Argentine Tango in her descriptive passages. Of course it doesn't explicitly state Ballroom Tango in the text but when referred to as "Tango" then one has to assume it is not anything other than the Ballroom variant.

The romance element with Seb I was less convinced of. For someone supposed to be a charmer he came across as less than charismatic to this reader and I really couldn't see what she saw in him.

I could see how this could be a very difficult read for some people, dealing as it does with acute illness, organ donation and death. The handling of this is sensitive without becoming mawkish and is to be applauded. However, some of Ailsa's introspection does stall the story in places and could well be why it took me so long to really gel with the book.

In summation the themes are laudable and dealt with, overall, with aplomb. It is a slowburner and you may need to really persevere to become immersed in the story.

I RECEIVED A FREE COPY OF THIS BOOK FROM READERS FIRST IN EXCHANGE FOR AN HONEST REVIEW.

Emily Field says

Ok, confession time. I'm massively biased in this review. Grab your copy of The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae, turn to the last paragraph of the acknowledgments section at the back of the book, and you'll see why. That bit about Emily Field, that's me! I was lucky enough to win a charity auction #AuthorsForGenfelltower where Stephanie Butland very generously agreed to allow the highest bidder to be named in her next book. That was pretty brave of Ms Butland. What if my name had been Lord Buckethead?! I'm a massive book

lover so the chance to be named and immortalised in a novel was too good an opportunity to miss. I've loved seeing my name and character in print!

Stephanie Butland is one of those authors I really warm to. She has a very gentle style of writing, as if she's talking to you. Her previous book, *Lost For Words*, is still one of my absolute favourites.

But I digress...onto the book in question. *The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae*. Without giving anything away, Ailsa Rae is approaching her thirties but she's lived her entire life wrapped in cotton wool by her mother due to her failing heart. She finally receives a heart transplant and now she's got some tangible hope of a more fulfilling life...but what do you do when you're told you're suddenly free from the burden of an imminent death?

Ailsa has a lot of soul searching to do. And being an adult, let's face it, isn't all it's cracked up to be!

This story was so sweet. Really easy to read and very enjoyable. Now that she is well, Ailsa, our protagonist, has to negotiate the changing relationship with her mother, friends and not least of all, herself, as she begins to explore what her life has to offer.

I love how the author has weaved in some beautiful metaphors with the Tango (dance) and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* throughout, to connect the story together. The book also contains very important messages about organ donation. This book is perfect holiday reading.

And I was SOOO relieved that my character in the book is really lovely...phew!

Thank you to Stephanie Butland for the opportunity to be a character. Loved it!

Anne says

I must confess that this book wasn't exactly what I was expecting – and that's largely my fault, because I rarely read the “blurb” before opening a new book. But the fact that it was so very different was entirely a positive – there's no wallowing here, no tear-soaked tissues (ok – maybe a little gulp from time to time...), instead a very likeable heroine trying to work out how to live and be happy, having been given a future she never expected to have.

The relationships in this book are just wonderful – particular Ailsa's with mother Hayley, as they adjust from being carer and invalid (or heart and lungs) to a looser and somewhat combative relationship, always coloured with love, as the child becomes an independent young woman who needs to stand on her own feet and make her own decisions. I loved the looks back at her relationship with Lennox – and really enjoyed her developing new one with Seb. The book is heavy on exchanged e-mails – not always a favourite with me, but in this book they're full of twists and turns and the personality of the correspondents, and I thought they worked really well. The blogging too is very cleverly used – that “wisdom of strangers” helping Ailsa's decision making until she has the strength to cast it aside and define her own path. I loved the introduction of the tango, its passion and the moments it led to – and the focus on *Romeo and Juliet* was just wonderful, and rather inspired.

And I really loved the book's ending – I felt I was watching the characters walk into their future, knew I had to leave them, and wanted to wish them well. A beautiful, uplifting read that I really enjoyed.

Kim says

This book was so cleverly written and gives you plenty of food for thought. Ailsa has lived with a chronic heart condition all her life. We get an insight into what life is like with a serious illness and the sorts of things you focus on.

A heart transplant totally transforms her life- but it still comes with reflection on the issues that totally consumed her life before. I enjoyed the different ways that the story is delivered and the relationships and worries that are explored.

Tania says

Initially I was a bit disappointed with this, because Netgalley compared it to Eleanor Oliphant Is Completely Fine which I loved, and this is not even in the same genre. Publishers should really start realizing that comparing books to famous books, when there are no similarities does no-one any favors.

That said, I ended up enjoying this sweet, easy-reading story about a young woman, born with heart complications, now trying to adapt to real life after finally receiving a heart transplant. I loved the different formats used to tell the story: blog posts and emails to news reports and letters. The descriptions of Edinburgh were also beautiful. I had an issue with the fact that Ailsa felt much younger than her 28 years, but understood why this was as the book progressed. I personally think this should be categorized as YA, as it addresses a lot of issues relevant to this genre, and some of the plot lines (like the one with her father) were simplified too much for my liking. Even with these issues, I enjoyed this enough for me to add another book by the author to my ever growing to read list.

Does anyone have any recommendations of good books set in Scotland or with Scottish characters. I would love to add some to my audible wish list, and would really appreciate your feedback.

Anne says

The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae is a very different book, not really what I expected at all, and I found it to be something of a departure from her usual writing style. However, once I'd settled myself into the story and begun to find out more about lead character, Ailsa, I was soon intrigued by the plot.

Ailsa is twenty-eight and has a serious heart condition. Serious enough for her and everyone around her to know that it's a possibility that she could die at any time. The only thing that could save her is a heart transplant, and whilst she's been waiting for this to happen, she's become a successful blogger with many followers.

The story is not about Ailsa's wait for a heart, but what happens to her after she's got one. Although she's twenty-eight, she's never had to grow up. She's never had to work, or to look after a house. Even the most mundane of decisions have been made for her by her blog followers; she creates polls for almost everything

that she needs to decide. After receiving her new heart, which she christens Apple, she knows that she can no longer be a child-woman, she has to find a job, do some exercise, experience the world and distance herself from her ever protective mother.

Stephanie Butland has clearly researched her subject very well. The reader is given an insight into what it must feel like to have a failing heart, to never quite know what's around the corner. It was the little things like Ailsa not being interested in following TV shows, just in case she doesn't get a chance to see the end that really struck home for me. This also leads into her blossoming relationship with Seb; a famous TV actor who has just had a cornea transplant.

I loved the structure of this novel. I like the different ways of telling the story, whether it's a blog post from My Blue Heart, an email, a snippet from Ailsa's past or a newspaper article.

The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae is a cleverly crafted story, it's uplifting, often funny, sometimes very emotional, but most of all it is a sensitive and charming story that deals with some serious issues.

Heart-warming, and a lovely read.

Karen Whittard says

Quirky, clever, fun, wonderful, feel good wonderful read. I seriously loved this book so much. It is a must buy must read for all chicklit and romance fans. I absolutely loved this.

Louise Wilson says

Ailsa Rae has had a heart transplant. Her relationship with her mother is at breaking point. She needs to find her father. Even her friends have left her behind. And then there's Lennox. Her best friend and one time lover. He was sick too. He didn't make it. How's she supposed to face all this without him.

Ailsa has had to deal with ill health and get used to the restrictions that this places on her lifestyle. She blogs about her life and finds this a coping mechanism. Her relationship with her mother is close and Ailsa could always rely on her. The timeline in this story jumps back and forward of which I found a little confusing at times. I liked how Ailsa's blog was used as a storytelling device. This book covers friendship, health, death, grief and much more. This is the first book I have read by this author and I will look out for more from her in the future.

I would like to thank NetGalley, Bonnier Zaffre and the author Stephanie Butland for my ARC in exchange for an honest review.

Janay Brazier says

Just reading the description of this book had me hooked in, so I started reading it the moment I finished my current read.

So, we follow Ailsa for through the year after her surgery. Ailsa was born with heart complications. Now, in her twenties, Ailsa is recovering from a heart transplant and finally feels like she can start living her life. However, she's battling with her mother about wanting to live alone, she's curious about her real father who walked away, and she misses Lennox, her best friend and first boyfriend, passed away a year ago when he didn't get the organ donation he needed.

First, let's talk about the characters. I wasn't sure if I was going to connect with Ailsa at first because of everything she's been through in terms of her medical history and recovery. However, I instantly clicked with Ailsa and was rooting for her from page one. Maybe it's because we are of a similar age and, although she's had very different and difficult life experiences compared to me, we share similar traits and thought processes.

It's always great when you can connect with a main character and feel excited for the journey ahead.

Then we have Sebastian, who was another immediate favourite for me. He gave Ailsa a new outlook on life and gave her the chance to try new things, such as taking a trip to London. I adored the interactions between the two of them and I could easily read another 400 page book of their emails.

There are some brilliantly written characters in this book, including Lennox and Ailsa's mother. The characters are not all perfect. They are flawed and real, and despite the differences between them and the reader, they are relatable.

I also loved that the setting played such a big part in this book, with the talk of the festival, the accents and general lifestyle. It made me want to take a trip there myself.

The storyline - as previously mentioned - follows Ailsa over the course of a year following her surgery. This plot is not just a tale of her recovery though. It's at the centre of everything happening in her life, as it would be, but there are so many other factors woven in.

It all leads back to her heart and how she finally wants to start living her life in a way that so many of us take for granted.

There are issues with her mother, about her moving out and Ailsa wanting to find her biological father, and there is a big focus on this mother-daughter relationship. There's also the mention of friendships and a romantic aspect as well, as we are introduced to Lennox through flashbacks to the previous year.

Speaking of flashbacks, I have to mention how much I loved the writing style and layout of this book.

I adored the format of this novel. It's one of my favourite things about it. The way it is set out like a diary, with the dated chapter headings, is genius. It made me more invested in the story and it felt so personal.

The use of media, such as news articles and emails, was one of my favourite features.

The personal touches continued throughout the book, with the emails shared between Ailsa and Sebastian, the news articles that Ailsa searched for when looking Sebastian up online, and - my overall favourite - the use of blog posts. The fact that Ailsa had a blog and was recording her journey through recovery was fantastic. Also, what a unique idea to include public polls within her blog to help her make decisions! As a reader and a blogger, it not only made me feel closer to her but it simply made me smile that something like this can be woven into a story like this.

This is a book that I will be recommending to everyone. It's been a while since I've read a book that's made me feel this much. It's simply fantastic and it has everything I look for in a contemporary novel. It's addictive, touching and brilliantly written. I feel like I am going to be raving about this book for quite some time. Have I just found a new favourite book? I think so. It's definitely in my top ten reads of 2018 so far (out of 25 books, and yes it's only April but I'm certain it will still be in my top ten by the end of the year!)

Paromjit says

Stephanie Butland has written a well researched and insightful novel about Ailsa's chronic life threatening heart condition, set in Edinburgh. 28 year old Ailsa has experienced lifelong heart problems which have curtailed and limited what it is possible for her to do, leaving her dependent on the loving care of her tremendous mother, Hayley. She is pessimistic about receiving the heart transplant she needs, and she has good reason to be, her close friend and lover, Lennox failed to receive one and never made it. However, to her complete surprise, she is one of the lucky ones, she receives a new heart, which brings with it life changing challenges as Ailsa becomes free to live a life that has never been open to her. The story goes back and forth in time as it follows Ailsa for the turbulent year after her heart surgery, with a narrative that includes blog entries, email exchanges, news articles and more. There is a focus on mother and daughter relationships, family friends, loss, grief, health, love and the joy of learning to dance for the first time.

There is much on Ailsa's mind, such as finding out about her biological father which Hayley has been less than forthcoming about, but Ailsa refuses to be fobbed off. The parent/carer and daughter relationship enters a fraught phase as Ailsa is finally in a position to become more independent, wanting a job and so much more. A fragile and vulnerable Ailsa began a blog as a coping mechanism for all that she has had to endure, allowing her a forum to express her insecurities, fears and doubts. She has lacked the faith and self belief required to make her own decisions, becoming heavily reliant on people visiting her blog to determine what she does, conducting polls on a variety of issues, such as the name, Apple, for her new heart. We see Ailsa begin to develop the self confidence, instinct and trust required for her new heart to inhabit the life she wants as she carves her own path. She reflects on what it has taken for her to have a life, that someone had to die for her to have a new life. A developing relationship with actor, Sebastian, who has also received a transplant, although a vastly different one, provides much needed succour and support for her.

Stephanie Butland writes a heartwarming story of Ailsa, her life lived under the darkest of clouds until she receives the unexpected gift and light of a new heart. This opens up a series of challenges that Ailsa embarks on such as the tearful but loving shift towards an adult to adult stance with her mother. It is a testament to Butland's skills that this book is emotionally evocative without descending into sentimental schmaltz levels. What is critically important is the contemporary issue of the severe shortage of organs available for transplants, and Butland highlights all the reasons why people should commit to carrying a donor card. A beautifully entertaining and thought provoking story with a lovely central character in Ailsa. Many thanks to Bonnier Zaffre for an ARC.

Paula Sealey says

I've been a huge fan of Stephanie Butland's previous books, but this one just didn't do it for me. It's the story of Ailsa, who has recently had a heart transplant and I was expecting an emotive read. I didn't get this though, and, other than Seb, I didn't really like any of the characters or gain enjoyment from the overall

story.

It jumps around a fair bit from present to past and it wasn't always obvious this had happened so I found myself having to go back and re-read parts. The story is told through blog posts, email exchanges, the characters themselves and narration and I found this all a bit much as it interrupted any flow the plot might have been gaining. I feel sad to be leaving a low rating for one of Stephanie's books, but I still look forward to her next publication.

*I received a copy of the book from the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

Sally Coles says

When Ailsa is given a new heart her life is about to change drastically but it is not just a physical change that takes place but a psychological one as well, suddenly she is going from being an invalid to someone with her whole life ahead of her. As an avid blogger she has taken advice from her readers by means of polls and also suddenly the relationship with her mother is changing as well.... how will she cope with all of this?

A great book with obviously a lot of research but I absolutely loved the character of Ailsa and her battles with life.... definitely worth reading

Liz Fenwick says

Utterly wonderful...quirky, heart-warming and emotional...loved it!!

Linda Hill says

Ailsa has waited 28 years for a new heart and getting one may not be the panacea for all ills she imagined.

Oh. This is so good. The Curious Heart of Ailsa Rae could so easily be saccharine or mawkish as a result of its subject matter but because of the wonderful quality of Stephanie Butland's writing it is neither, but rather is an honest, uplifting and riveting read. Indeed, there is considerable humour through what could be bleak moments and I especially liked the dynamics between Ailsa and Seb.

I loved meeting Ailsa, Seb and Hayley in particular although even the more minor characters have a vital and interesting part to play in the story. Lennox in particular adds depth to Ailsa that she simply wouldn't have if we didn't see her relationship with him. I think it was particularly the wonderfully natural dialogue that made these people come alive for me. Stephanie Butland knows how to use an unfinished sentence to perfection so that the reader feels the full brunt of emotion without her characters having to spell out their feelings. Ailsa is so real to me because of her flawed personality, her need for affirmation and her less than perfect physical appearance. She is no different to any one of us, save perhaps for her transplant, and this is the crux of the matter. Having her life saved doesn't bring instant happiness and fulfilment any more than life does for the ordinary person.

And that theme of transplant and donating organs is so brilliantly handled. I've carried a donor card since

they were introduced and feel strongly we all should but Stephanie Butland never preaches. She merely presents the thoughts of her characters and allows her reader to make up their own mind about the validity of becoming a potential donor. I think her writing is all the more powerful as a result.

Although the concept of organ donation is a strong and engaging theme, for me the essence of *The Curious Heart* of Ailsa Rae and the most powerful aspect is Ailsa's need to grow up and become truly 'herself' and an independent woman. I loved the thought that the past might shape us, but we can shape our future.

I thought *The Curious Heart* of Ailsa Rae was a lovely book. Reading it made me experience a range of emotions and ultimately gave me optimism and a genuine feeling of warmth. I really recommend it. Oh, and also, I recommend looking to join a tango class. I'm off to find one near me!

<https://lindasbookbag.com/2018/07/16/...>

Karen Mace says

This was a touching read and introduces the lovely character of Ailsa Rae, who is determined to live life to the fullest after being given a second chance when she receives a heart transplant, after suffering with poor health throughout her childhood..... but only if the blog poll results help guide her decisions!

Ailsa has had to deal with ill health from the word go, and she has got used to the restrictions that this places on her lifestyle, and also blogs about life from her perspective and finds this a great way of helping her cope, and also helping her make big life decisions! While she was in hospital waiting for the heart transplant she loses someone very close to her, and this also really affects the way she sees life now that she's been given another shot at things.

She has a close relationship with her mother who has always been there for her, but as she tries to act like an adult after being cared for like a child for so long, this does put a strain on the bond between them.

The timeline in this book does chop and change quite a bit which did get a little confusing at times, as it switches from life before, during and after the transplant, but doesn't over complicate the enjoyment of reading. I didn't feel a strong emotional connection with Ailsa as she is one of those characters who doesn't want your sympathy, she just wants to be given a fair go and not be held back by circumstances, but I did feel for her with some of the things she went through which were out of her control and wondered how I would deal with them in her situation.

Her life is made a little more complicated by the friendship she makes with Sebastian who she seemed to connect with instantly due to his sense of humour and honesty about his transplant, and I loved reading their messages to each other and how they supported one another.

The blog posts were also another fascinating element as Ailsa could really open up on her blog about all her hopes and fears, how the illness had affected her and it was really insightful to see that side of her and how she struggled with the issue of what she does with her life now, as she's always had a get out clause with her health issues.

I really enjoyed how this book didn't sugar coat things and didn't get over emotional with the issues that faced the character and just dealt with things with warmth and humour. It's a book about being braver and following your heart - even if that heart isn't yours!!

