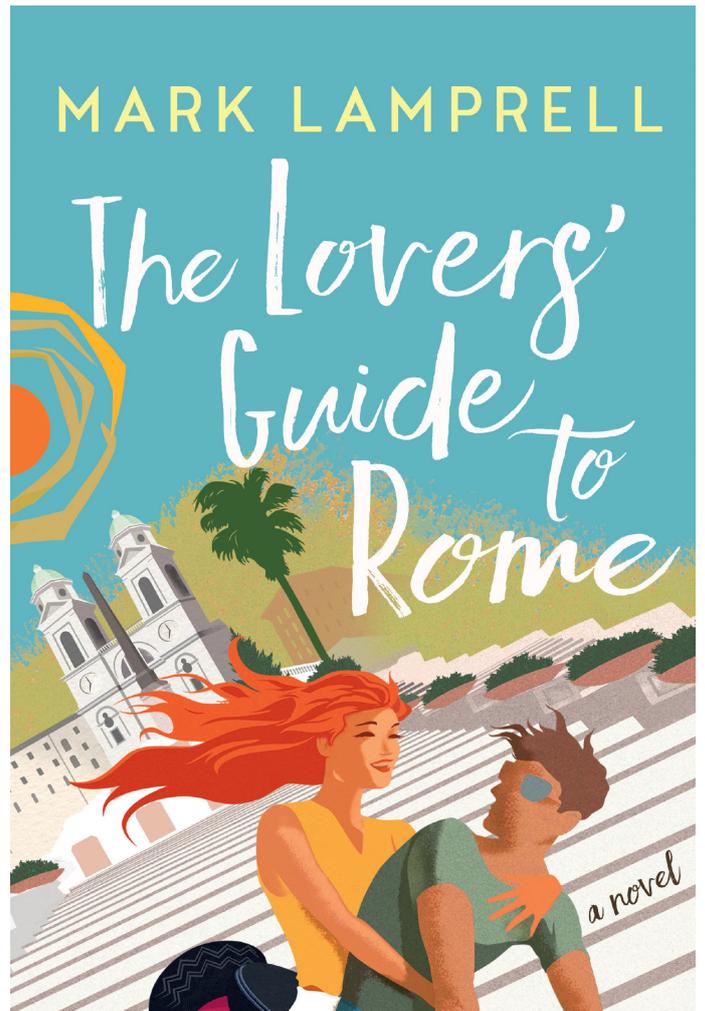


ALLEN & UNWIN



READING GROUP NOTES

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About the book

A gorgeous multi-stranded love story set in Rome. *One Day* meets *Roman Holiday*!

This is the place where passions are aroused, senses inflamed, and lovers fall into each other's arms. It all appears to unfold like magic - but I will tell you what really happens. Rome - glorious, eternal, intoxicating. Could there be a better place on earth to fall in love?

Young artist Alice has come to Rome for adventure before settling down with her safe boyfriend. But when fate intervenes to show her there really is such a thing as love at first sight, will she find the courage to follow her heart?

Meg and Alec fell in love in Rome many years before and have returned to rekindle their amore, but have they left it too late?

Connie and Lizzie are in Rome to scatter the ashes of Connie's beloved husband Henry, who's also Lizzie's brother. But Lizzie doesn't know the real story of how Connie and Henry met there decades before, nor what long-hidden secrets lie waiting to be unearthed.

And what of Rome itself? It turns out that the Eternal City has secrets only lovers can glimpse. The magic of Rome is also the magic of the human heart.

The Lovers' Guide to Rome is a witty, sophisticated and bewitching novel about the greatest mystery of all.

About the author

Mark Lamprell works in film and television. He co-wrote the film *Babe: Pig in the City* and wrote and directed the award-winning feature *My Mother Frank*. His first novel, *The Full Ridiculous*, was published last year and has been sold to the United States, Canada, Poland and Israel. Mark has holidayed in Rome for many years.

Reviews

'Absolutely enchanting, an ode to all the semi-magical towns and vibrant cities in the world where fate is decided. Love has many faces - and Lamprell knows them all. This is a book for those willing to travel the road of love from the beginning, across the long middle, to the end, over and over again. (And, by the way: you will discover the secret places of Rome in every chapter!)' - Nina George, author of the *New York Times* bestseller, *The Little Paris Bookshop*

'The book is a loving portrait of a beautiful city [and] a clever construct from a fine story teller,' - *The Age*

'...A big-hearted, feel-good book that picks you up and carries you away from everyday life by immersing you in a tale of love and magic, cobbled streets and breathtaking surroundings.' - Suzanne Leal, *The Weekend Australian*

'If a trip to Rome is out of the question, this is the next best thing.' - Deborah Bogle, *Adelaide Advertiser*

For discussion

- ☞ Discuss this description of Rome, from the prologue: “Rome so swirls with stories of saints and sinners, martyrs and monsters, lovers and fighters, that she compels you towards her, like gravity. If you linger long enough amongst her piazzas and monuments, you will find yourself simultaneously lost and found, swept away by her grand cavalcade of history, captivated by her crumbling beauty. Built of grandiose and preposterous dreams, Roma lays bare the delusion that reality is shaped by realists. No one leaves her unaltered. Part of you always loves her.” Have you been to Rome? What did you think of the novel’s portrait of the city? How does the novel “lay bare the delusion that reality is shaped by realists”?
- ☞ The narration is full of historical anecdotes about Rome. What do these asides add? What is their relation to the more intimate love stories?
- ☞ Each chapter begins with an epigraph. What is the cumulative effect of all of the quotations? Did you have a favourite?
- ☞ The narrator describes himself as a “Quantum Mechanic” and a “Genius of Love.” What does his role in the characters’ stories suggest about the novel’s view of love? How important is fate in the characters’ relationships?
- ☞ The characters in this novel are deeply flawed, and they often treat one another badly. Did you find them likeable? Do you think it’s important for characters to be likeable?
- ☞ Discuss this passage, from Alice’s first chapter: “She could hear New York... although she felt reasonably certain that the city was in fact actually there, she had often suspected that another city, very close but obscured by some deficit in her perception, also existed. In that Other World, she could not be judged or derided for being clever or dull because the rules... did not apply. In that place, there simply were no rules. How she longed to go there sometimes.” How does Alice’s relationship to rules change over the course of the novel?
- ☞ When Alec tells Meg he thinks moving to Rome might make them happier, she replies: “That’s just some vacation fantasy... People the world over go somewhere exotic or exciting or relaxing and think, ‘Oh if I just stay here, everything will be different.’ Trouble is, wherever you go, there you are. And sooner or later you’re leading the same old dreary life. Only now you’re in Rome, not California.” Do you agree? How important is place in determining one’s happiness?
- ☞ Meg tells Alec, “That’s how we operate as adults in the world without killing each other. We pretend!” What is each of the characters pretending at the start of the novel? How does that change as their stories progress?
- ☞ Alec says that because he has feelings for Stephanie, he must no longer have feelings for Meg. Do you think there is truth to that, or can you have feelings for more than one person at once?

- Discuss this description of Alec and Meg’s relationship: “Once he had possessed her, it slowly dawned on him that he could not intoxicate himself with another person and let that be his life. Over the years, he had let her know of this epiphany in infinitesimally small increments. A restrained smile. An irritated curve of the lips. A brief but exasperated squint. Meg had collected all of his feedback and dutifully collated it. In response, she became more dramatic, more outrageous, more captivating. The more he withdrew, the harder she worked.” How does their relationship evolve over the course of the novel?
- When he is trying to get back together with Meg, Alec says he doesn’t want happiness—he wants her. What is the relationship between love and happiness for each of the characters?
- Alice asserts: “You don’t fall in love... You choose to love a particular person. Humour, brains, eye-colour, smile, there’s a huge list of things that click, that tell you this is the match for you... Magic and voosh are there but they’re on the list... They’re part of the things you consider.” What do you think?
- Constance tells Lizzie what Henry thought of the afterlife: “He said that people left but that love remained.” How is that statement borne out over the course of the novel?
- Lizzie and Constance often joke about being “scary old ladies,” and Lizzie is hesitant to begin a relationship with Horatio because “she was an old lady”: “This evening’s flirtation was surprising enough; she should be grateful and move on. One last hurrah before the curtains closed. To make anything more of this unexpected delight would be ridiculous. And foolish. And potentially humiliating.” It’s rare to see older women cast as romantic heroines. How does this novel defy our cultural stereotypes about love and age?
- The blue tile plays a significant role in all of the narrative threads. The tilemaker describes the colour by describing the ocean: “It appears to be blue... The water herself filters out the other colours but the blue remains. The blue light travels down and reflects off the white sand. The waves of light dance with the waves of the ocean. They are in a marriage, you see, of light and form.” Discuss the importance of the blue tile and its relationship with the narrator.

Suggested further reading

The Full Ridiculous – Mark Lamprell

One Day – David Nicholls

Beautiful Ruins – Jess Walter

Love in a Cold Climate – Nancy Mitford

I Capture the Castle – Dodie Smith