



A Pretty Mess

Carla Caruso

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Sometimes, to come clean, you've got to get your hands dirty ...

Celeste Pretty, a self-confessed neat freak, has found the job she was born to do: a professional organizer, decluttering people's homes and workplaces. Her new business gets off to a cracking start when she lands her first client, health and fitness guru Natalia Samphire, in the well-heeled suburb of Astonvale. But things get messy at Natalia's mansion when Celeste finds a blackmail note and other mysterious items. And then there's Lenny Muscat, the sexy builder renovating the place, whose constant presence is muddling Celeste's usually organized brain.

When things get decidedly suspicious at the mansion, she and Lenny have to team up to investigate. But will Celeste emerge with her heart and professional reputation unscathed?

A Pretty Mess Details

Date : Published October 1st 2014 by AUS Impulse

ISBN :

Author : Carla Caruso

Format : Kindle Edition 260 pages

Genre : Romance, Fiction, Mystery, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit

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From Reader Review A Pretty Mess for online ebook

Jody says

Review first posted on my blog: <http://spoonfulofhappyendings.blogspot...>

Celeste Pretty is a professional organizer; a job which is simply perfect for a neat freak like herself. She decided to start her own company called POPink and has landed her first very important job, namely helping fitness guru Natalia Samphire organise her new home. Celeste wants to do anything she can to make sure she does a good job, but at the same time she's busy dealing with her cousin and new assistant Flip and Lenny, the handsome builder who's working on Natalia's house and always seems to be around. To make matters even worse, Celeste unexpectedly discovers Natalia is being blackmailed by someone, and soon she finds herself entangled in way more than just the organizing job she signed up for...

This book can be described as a combination of enjoyable chick lit and an entertaining touch of detective/who-done-it/mystery. I really liked the plotline of the novel and it didn't take long before I was fully immersed by the story, guessing what would happen to the characters and how it would all work out in the end. It took me a bit of time to get used to the main protagonist, Celeste. There were moments when I really liked her, and then her sometimes slightly snobbish behaviour came around the corner again. However, I did warm to her as the story progressed and I definitely wouldn't mind reading other stories in which she stars as the leading lady.

Lenny, the hunky builder who works for celebrity Natalia Samphire just like Celeste, was a great male character and I think many female readers will develop a small crush on him like I did. The chemistry between him and Celeste is undeniable and really added something fun to the story. There are some colloquialisms used in the book which I wasn't familiar with, but from the context I could get what I needed to understand what was going on, so it definitely didn't ruin the reading experience. Overall, 'A Pretty Mess' is a fun and entertaining chick lit and mystery mix and I already look forward to the next part of Carla Caruso's 'Astonvale' series!

Hooked On Books says

Reviewed for Hookedonbooks

Celeste and Lenny are just adorable in this. The quirkiness, the banter between the two of them made me laugh out loud! A little mystery to bring them together and spend time with one another. I could feel Celeste's battle with her own feelings regarding her Dad's environment and a certain scene she would rather have not been witness too! Lenny is just a good person all around, him offering to help Celeste's Dad. This was a fun read! I enjoyed reading this! I give this 4.5 stars.

Odette Cortés says

When Celeste Pretty decides to start her own new organizing company, POPink, her first job uncluttering a fitness mogul's life is very important. Trying to do her best while keeping her flaky cousin Flip under control and making a lasting first impression in more than enough on her plate. Nonetheless, she wasn't expecting to

meet Lenny the builder, whom she develops a slight crush that might escalate. But what really surprises her is that suddenly she is in the middle of a blackmail scheme, and so Celeste does the only thing she can do, she investigates.

Carla Caruso's book, *A Pretty Mess*, was entertaining and sweet. Celeste has her adorably cute moments, and then there are some other moments when she is extremely snobbish, judgmental and prejudice, which is a combo that doesn't make her lovable, at least to me. Being a neat freak she is usually mounted on a high horse that makes her think less of the messier people in her life. This just seems a little rude.

The rest of the book and characters I liked, also the double perspective between Lenny and Celeste was nice. But what I really enjoyed was the mystery part of the book, finding out who was being blackmailed, by whom and why it was nice. I guess it channeled a little of *Desperate Housewives* in my mind.

Jessica Alcazar says

ARC provided via NetGalley by HarperCollins Publishers Australia for an honest review.

I knew I would like this book just by reading the blurb. This is my first time reading Carla Caruso, and I look forward to more in the future. This book has a little intrigue, suspense, romance, comedy and wit! The story is very entertaining and sweet. Our heroine, Celeste, is rather a neat-freak and OCD which sometimes makes her come across as snobbish, but I think that's just the perfectionist in her coming out. It was a little difficult deciphering the colloquialisms, but not enough to deter from the writing. The suspense part of the story was almost like a who-done-it. It kept me really intrigued and entertained and I ended up reading the book in just one sitting.

Cindy Roesel says

A PRETTY MESS (HarperCollinsPublishersAustralia) is the first book in novelist, Carla Caruso's, *Sexy Messy Mystery Series* that features organizer-extraordinaire, Celeste Pretty and hunky builder Lenny Muscat teaming up to right the wrongs in the fancy-schmancy upscale enclave of Astonvale, outside Sydney, Australia.

Celeste has given up her Interior Designer business and has landed her first client who just happens to be celebrity Natalia Samphire, creator of the Ballet-Tastic barre work-out which is bigger than Zumba. Yummy mummy's are throwing dollars and themselves, while signing up for classes at her brand new studios which aren't even finished being built yet all with hopes to get tight buns. It's Celeste's job to turn the very cluttered Natalia's working/living space into a fabulous colorful all-purpose, friendly and beautiful space to live and work - especially to entertain clients.

The ironic thing is that Miss Organized Celeste's own father, is a hoarder, he can't even live in his own home. He has to live in a bus behind his house and she tries to keep it a secret from people she comes across. One person she meets is Lenny Muscat who is also working on Natalia's building project. The two of them start off as work associates, then friends, and it progresses and you know where it's going, but my fingers aren't going to type anything revealing. No way!

But something isn't quite right on Natalia's Astonvale project. First Celeste and then Lenny come across some unsavory comings and goings and if they hope to get paid, it'll be in their best interests to solve the caper, which is just what they do.

Carla has a way of creating fun quirky secondary characters that get under your skin. You enjoy them while

they appear and kind of miss them when they're gone. Her assistant "Flip" made me laugh. She was smarter than I thought at first. Her best friend, Betty Lou, was another character I really enjoyed. The woman is a nanny for triplets - how can you not love her?

Celeste is the kind of character you'll enjoy spending time with and watching her get into trouble and then end up barely saving the day. Of course, the best part is how she does it with that yummy hunk of hers, Lenny. It's that ying and yang of love that keeps us coming back to romantic comedies. It works under Carla Caruso's direction.

Thanks to www.netgalley.com and HarperCollinsPublishers for a kindle copy of A PRETTY MESS in exchange for an honest review. Check out www.CarlaCaruso.com.au for all things Carla.

Arielle Deltoro says

Pretty Mess is a page-turning novel about love, suspense and living in the moment.

The novel takes place in Astonvale, an Australian suburb, home of the well-to-do and extremely socially aware crowd. Living in Southern California, I personally love reading novels that are based internationally and this is one of the first I've read based in AU.

Caruso's characters are lively, entertaining and compelling. Celeste Pretty is a woman after my own heart; she's organized, determined and is willing to work her way up in the world to achieve success. The true spark of irony is that she is a professional organizer and her father is an extreme hoarder. She craves organization and order so desperately, in part because of her father's ridiculous habit of collecting junk to the point where his home is an unlivable safety hazard. Somehow, through all the chaos, he still manages a bit of order. His mess never made any sense to her, but somehow he always seemed to know exactly where things were.

Celeste has an interesting perspective on relationships, especially for someone whose parents truly loved one another. She's in a relationship with a man that she barely has anything in common with and her best friend doesn't even like him. It wasn't possible to like every single thing about the person you dated, was it? Fate comes into play when Celeste books her first gig as a professional organizer for a celebrity client and suddenly she's doing everything in her power to resist a gorgeous man that might actually be the perfect guy. At first glance he seems like the complete opposite of the type of guys she's into, despite him having a successful career and being completely gorgeous, he doesn't strike her as someone that does relationships and commitment. "I can't be friends with women, not good-looking ones." Lenny continues to get distracted by the sexy, sassy side of Celeste but keeps telling himself that it's not the right time for a relationship. Can Fate work it's magic and get these two together? Will Celeste ever acknowledge that Lenny is honest, dependable and most importantly, caring enough to take a chance on?

One consistent theme of the novel is the idea of Carpe Diem because you never know how short life is. For someone so organized, it's amazing that Celeste is not much of a planner; she prefers to live in the moment and let things happen as they will. I might be a professional organiser, but even I don't think we're meant to live tidy, predictable lives with everything laid out neatly before us. Because often things don't go according to plan. At the same token, sometimes things happen in your life and you need to grab hold of the opportunities and run with them. "I learned a valuable lesson, son. Life never goes as planned. You've got to grab life by the horns, take opportunities when you see them. They may never come your way again."

Everyone has hidden secrets, though some people's are worse than others. Another of the themes I took away from this novel is the unbelievable (yet sadly true) notion what some people will do for money! Money can't buy happiness, but it can buy expensive things. However, nothing in this world is worth losing your honesty,

dignity and freedom over, especially if you have to take money that isn't yours to buy those things. I'm a big believer in Karma and this book reconfirmed that notion; you get back what you put in and eventually your evil deeds will catch up with you.

Celeste is hired to transform and organize Natalia's home and throughout her time working on that project, she ends up transforming her own life as a result. A Pretty Mess is a fun and entertaining read and I highly recommend it. I was happy to see that this is the first book in a series, that means there are more fabulous novels on the way from Caruso!

Side note: All quotes have been pulled from a pre-published review copy. I apologize if any excerpts did not make it into the final published novel, however, they will give you a sense of the overall feel of the book and I'm sure that you will absolutely love it!

Lee says

I was quite excited to receive this book via Net Galley, because I really enjoyed *Second Chance* by the same author. In fact I enjoyed *Second Chance* so much that my expectations might have been too high for *A Pretty Mess* and, as a consequence, I've struggled with this review. I just have to come right out and say, however, that this title doesn't have the instant appeal of that quirky time travel romance. This book started out promising, but I feel like it lost its way in the romance department somewhere along the line. Our heroine, Celeste Pretty (I love the clever title!), has just started up her own business as a personal organiser and landed a contract with a famous fitness guru. At the Lorna Jane wannabe's house she meets building contractor, Lenny. Celeste and Lenny are instantly attracted to each other, but their romantic plot lacks... Any real conflict perhaps? As a result, their scenes become a little bland after a while. Lenny's conflict/reasoning for not becoming seriously involved with Celeste gets annoyingly immature after hearing it a few times. Celeste's reservations are a little more interesting, and I do respect the way Caruso gave Celeste a background that made her almost-OCD and judgmental personality realistic, but I also still found Celeste a little grating towards the back half of the book. Surprisingly, also around the half way mark, the romantic plot is put on the back burner to make way for the 'mystery' plot. I was only thinking recently about the lack of Australian writers in the cosy mystery market. This book fits nicely into this very popular niche, I believe. It ticks all the boxes of the usual ingredients of that genre, including the more interesting and quirky minor characters, the basic crime that's easily solved, and a cat! If I was marketing the book, I would have definitely pushed the cosy mystery tag, instead of the chick-lit/romance (that I assumed I would read from the cover). If I had to judge it as a cosy mystery alone, I would have felt satisfied, but judging it as a romance, I can only award it 3/5.

Since posting this review, I've discovered that this is in fact the first in a series of cosy mysteries books 'starring' Celeste Pretty. The ebook I received had no blurb and I like to avoid spoilers on the internet, so I did not realise this as I was reading. I still say the cover (the only hint I had whilst reading) is more chick lit romance than cosy mystery. 'An Astonvale novel' also gives me no clue. I'd suggest the publishers change that to 'An Astonvale cosy mystery' to make this clearer. As an introduction to the characters, it is still only 3/5, but I will admit I will probably buy the next in the series, just to see how Flip and Betty-Lou are getting on.

Maritza says

Description:

Sometimes, to come clean, you've got to get your hands dirty ...

Celeste Pretty, a self-confessed neat freak, has found the job she was born to do: a professional organiser, de-cluttering people's homes and workplaces. Her new business gets off to a cracking start when she lands her first client, health and fitness guru Natalia Samphire, in the well-heeled suburb of Astonvale. But things get messy at Natalia's mansion when Celeste finds a blackmail note and other mysterious items. And then there's Lenny Muscat, the sexy builder renovating the place, whose constant presence is muddling Celeste's usually organised brain.

When things get decidedly suspicious at the mansion, she and Lenny have to team up to investigate. But will Celeste emerge with her heart and professional reputation unscathed?

My Review:

I liked the book. It started out slow and it was very hard for me to get into it. I read 3 other books before coming back to this one. It did pick up and I finished the rest of the book in about 3 hrs. It has romance, comedy, and a little mystery. I liked that aspect.

Celeste was a little hard to like. She came off as snobbish. Regardless, I did like the book and would recommend it.

marlin1 says

3.5 stars

Celeste Pretty has gone out on her own in business. Being a neat freak, she's trying her hand at being a professional organiser and her first client is Natalia Samphire, a newly made health and fitness guru. While sorting out rooms, she stumbles on some objects that don't fit in with the image of a health and fitness guru. Then, on further investigation, she discovers that Natalia is being blackmailed. With the help of Lenny Muskat, the builder who is renovating Natalia's home and someone she is suddenly running into everywhere, they team together to solve the mystery.

This was a fun, light hearted story. I found it a bit predictable as in the fact there was a good friend, odd but loveable parent, sexy man, annoying ex boss but it all worked for me and I found it a very easy read and good distraction for a number of hours. I won't hesitate to look for the next instalment in Celeste's adventures.

Thank you to Netgalley and the publisher for the opportunity to read and review this book.

Srivilasica says

Summary: Celeste Pretty, a self-confessed neat freak, starts her own organizing company, POPink, which is intended to help de-clutter people's homes and workplaces. She is off to a great start when she lands her first client, health and fitness guru Natalia Samphire, in the well-heeled suburb of Astonvale. However, things go

awry because she has a hard time keeping her growing attraction to the builder Lenny and her assistant (and cousin) Flip's behaviour under control. A blackmail note and other mysterious items make the situation increasingly messy. Celeste and Lenny decide to team up to investigate the mystery.

My thoughts: This is my first Carla Caruso book. I liked the play of words in the title.

The book had a slow start. It is neither a great romance nor a full-blown mystery. Celeste and Lenny are instantly attracted to each other, but their romance is slightly bland. Lenny's and Celeste's reasoning for not becoming seriously involved seems immature at times. The mystery is also light; so there is not much suspense.

However, I liked that the book is not a cliché romance that revolves around Celeste and Lenny. It has a nice mixture of intrigue, suspense, romance, comedy and wit.

The book has some interesting and quirky secondary characters: Natalia, who despite being a celebrity seems likeable; her assistant Minka who is an odd combination of weird and boring; her musclebound, tattooed fiancé Mike; Celeste's father, a hoarder; Flip, her street-smart cousin; Betty Lou, her head-up-in-dreams friend; and the two hairdressers, Araminta and Kim-Ly, the former a friend of Celeste and the latter, of Natalia. And, the screechy, attitude-filled Siamese cat, Custard.

I also liked the double perspective between Lenny and Celeste and all the cultural references to Australia.

All in all, a light and entertaining read that helped fix my rather sombre mood.

Note: I was given this book in exchange for an honest review by HarperCollins Publishers Australia. I thank them for that.

Read all my reviews at [My Two Pennies' Worth](#)

Jasmine from How Useful It Is says

Slow paced, lack of action, but good real life advices, humor, light-hearted, almost bland kind of story. Detail review here www.howusefulitis.wordpress.com

Sam Still Reading says

I adored *Catch of the Day* by Carla Caruso – it was sweet and funny in equal amounts. Naturally, I was excited to see she had a new book out, the first in a series starring Celeste Pretty, professional organiser and amateur sleuth. This is a slightly different direction – more cosy mystery with romantic elements than *Catch of the Day*, but I still enjoyed it.

Adelaide and South Australia seem to be an increasingly popular setting for romance stories these days, which suits me fine as I'm reasonably familiar with the state (mmm...Golden North ice cream). *A Pretty Mess* is set in the posh suburb of Astonvale. It's a fictional place, but it can easily be imagined if you know Adelaide suburbs. Celeste has just started her own business as a professional organiser (she's not on the best of terms with her former boss, who keeps popping up in Celeste's life) and she's thrilled to have landed a job with Natalia Samphire, who is taking Australia by storm with her ballet-based exercise routine,

supplemented with tons of merchandise. Natalia needs her home and workspace sorted, and Celeste is determined to get it right, despite an unreliable, petulant assistant in Flip. Lenny is the builder on site finishing renovations and he and Celeste strike up a friendship. When Celeste notices Natalia under stress and the appearance of what seems to be blackmail notes, she and Lenny get on the case to find out what Natalia is hiding and who could be blackmailing her. There's time for a little romance in between and meeting Celeste's family, who are anything but dull.

This is a cosy mystery type of book. It's quirky and funny and there are no life-threatening moments. I found it to be a light read, although it did take me time to warm to Celeste. I found it difficult to work out whether she was social climbing to Astonvale (e.g. the tennis and charity events), but when her background was explained, I thought that she was suffering from a bit of paranoia about her place in society. Lenny was quite different. He's an honest, what you see is what you get character who is kind and very giving. I really disliked the character of Flip. Not only was she immature, but she felt like a waste of space. I hope she grows up in the following books in the series or gets her comeuppance!

I enjoyed the mystery – it wasn't too heavy and perfect for reading on my commute (which happened to be extra-long at the time I was reading A Pretty Mess). It's easy to remember where you left the book and continue. I didn't guess the identity of the blackmailer and I did like how Natalia got one over them. The romance wasn't prominent in this book. I did miss this a bit, but I liked how Lenny was able to be independent of the romance to help solve the mystery. I'm interested to know how Lenny and Celeste's relationship progresses in future books (hang on to him Celeste, he's a keeper). Celeste's friends provided some light relief in the book, so I'd love to see more of them again (Betty-Lou, champion cate decorator was a scream).

While I enjoyed A Pretty Mess, I think it's more of a cosy mystery than a romance novel. I wasn't expecting this when I started to read it and it took me a little while to get my head around this. I am looking forward to seeing more Lenny in future books!

Thank you to Harper Collins for the eARC of this book.

<http://samstillreading.wordpress.com>

Brenda says

Fun loving characters populate Astonvale in a new series by Carla Caruso. Sparks fly and barbs are exchanged as Celeste Pretty and Lenny Muscat battle into romance.

Celeste Pretty is turning 30 and starting her own organising business after leaving an interior design firm whose boss won't seem to get out of Celeste's life. Her first client is fitness guru Natalia Samphire. Natalia's home is being renovated by contractor Lenny Muscat who is not only handy but handsome, single and owns his own hilltop home. What more can a girl ask for, especially when he is willing to help Celeste investigate Natalia's blackmailer?

Looking forward to book 2 in this series. Will it feature biscuit heir Mitchell, or cake baker/nanny Betty Lou or one of the other interesting characters we meet in this novel?

Blessie (Mischievous Reads) says

Review from: Mischievous Reads

***ARC courtesy of HarperCollins Publishers Australia via Netgalley in exchange for honest review

Celeste Pretty just landed her first client as a professional organizer and it's none other than the oh so famous health and fitness guru, Natalia Sapphire who just moved to the high life suburbs of Astonvale. A lot of pressure though, especially when there's an Adonis builder by the name of Lenny Muscat, working in the same place, who constantly gets her all riled up. But when things start to get weird and out of place, with blackmail letters and mysterious items popping out of nowhere, Celeste teams up with Lenny to investigate, but spending more time with the gorgeous hunk means she's got to steer clear and guard her heart.

This is the first book I've read of this author, and originally, I'd thought that Carla Caruso would have been English due to her interesting and sophisticated writing style. I assumed wrong, because she's actually from Australia! But nonetheless, that doesn't change my thoughts about the author, and I plan to read more of her works. If you're a fan of Sophie Kinsella's writing, you may find Carla Caruso's work to be quite similar, along with the language and the humor too. But I'd say there's also big differences between the styles of the two authors.

In *A Pretty Mess*, we meet Celeste Pretty, a professional organizer -- basically her dream job, because she's a total neat freak -- and she just landed her first client, a big one in fact, in the name of Natalia Sapphire, a health and fitness guru, who just moved in the suburbs of Astonvale. When she starts working on Natalia's home, Celeste and her young preppy assistant, Flip, discovers various mysterious items in her home -- an anonymous blackmail letter, a gun and a drawer filled with lots and lots of sweets. Just who is the fitness guru really?

But of course, a chic lit is definitely not complete without the man candy: Lenny Muscat, builder. Owner of Muscat Building Group working on the renovations of Natalia's mansion. "An Adonis in a dirt-stained grey tee, cargo shorts and steel-capped boots" as described by the author. Total yum.

Upon having found out about the mysterious items and suspicious acts by Natalia, Celeste and Lenny team up to investigate and find out what Natalia is hiding.

"I run a business called POPink, Professional Organising on Pink."

"An organiser, huh? So when you tell someone you're rearranging your sock drawer, you really are." He squinted at the card again. "Although, shouldn't it be P-double-O-P, not POP? As in, Professional Organising on Pink?"

Now if I had been Celeste, I wouldn't even be pissed if I was told that because let's be real, I'd be drooling and totally mesmerized by this god standing before me. Celeste, to me, comes off as a stressful character, with her work and her father being a total hoarder, Flip, her slutty teenage assistant and Imogen, her ex-boss who's always there to ruin her.

"The only Lenny I know sings and has the last name, Kravitz," Celeste murmured before she could stop herself.

"It's short for Leonardu, which is Maltese. Some say I'm as sweet and irresistible as a Malteser."

Now, if you're thinking that Lenny is one hot smartass, then I'm glad we're on the same page, because he definitely is as sweet and irresistible as a Malteser. He's definitely one of my favorite male characters and the perfect hero. He's charming, funny and most of all, he's a man who handles his own bucks and business. Now that's the kind of guy us girls should all be looking for, aye? Downfall? He's not interested in a relationship, but we can change that, can't we? Celeste can, for darn sure.

These two are just so insanely cute together because of the constant bounce between their love-hate relationship. Celeste, the organized, prim and proper; Lenny, the spontaneous hottie who doesn't mind getting his hands dirty. Their relationship build up comes off as a slow burn, definitely not the lust at first sight -- well, maybe a just a little bit on the lust.

I love how the story line isn't the typical cliche romance where the whole story revolves around the lead characters (though I wouldn't mind a story like that too), because this book got me reading continuously due to the thrill factor. This story may be quite short, but it's filled with tons of unexpected funny and kind of scandalous twists and turns. Big kudos to the author for that. Also not to mention the secondary characters, how they are given specific personalities that make things more interesting. A big downfall in a story is when other characters turn out to be too plain and are particularly just backdrops in the story, but in this book, Carla Caruso surely defined each and everyone with a particular personality. And since this seems to be start of a series, I'm expecting a Betty-Lou (Celeste's best friend) story next.

This read was definitely a great one, no matter how short it was and can easily be read in one sitting. If you're looking for a short, exciting, romantic read, this book is definitely for you.

Jessi says

This was on the low end for a three-star book for me. I can't quite remember what was annoying to me about this story since most of the parts I can remember were things I would have liked (thus the three stars) but the main character was irritating to me. She was a stereotypical "klutzy mess" but was supposed to be a big-time organizer? Eh.

Celeste Pretty has just opened her new business, "Professional Organizer on Pink," the initials of which she only just realized. And her first huge client is a fitness professional, Natalia Samphire. But Natalia's life is not all the peaches and cream it seems to be. In fact, Celeste finds blackmail notes that threaten to unveil the truth of Natalia's past.

(view spoiler)

Definitely the ending is sequel bait. Secondary characters were pretty good, though.
