



## The Secrets of Primrose Square

*Claudia Carroll*

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**The Secrets of Primrose Square** Claudia Carroll

*From the number one bestselling author Claudia Carroll comes a warm, feel-good story that will make you laugh and cry, and above all, leave you with a feeling of hope.*

**'A wise, warm and witty gem . . . I loved it'** *Carmel Harrington*

**'Funny, smart and thoroughly engaging'** *Liz Nugent*

**'It made me laugh and it made me weep . . . a stunning book'** *Sinead Moriarty*

**So many stories hidden behind closed doors . . .**

It's late at night and the rain is pouring down on the Dublin city streets. A mother is grieving for her dead child. She stands silently outside the home of the teenage boy she believes responsible. She watches . . .

In a kitchen on the same square, a girl waits anxiously for her mum to come home. She knows exactly where she is, but she knows she cannot reach her.

A few doors down, and a widow sits alone in her room. She has just delivered a bombshell to her family during dinner and her life is about to change forever.

And an aspiring theatre director has just moved in to a flat across the street. Her landlord is absent, but there are already things about him that don't quite add up . . .

Welcome to Primrose Square.

**Praise for Claudia Carroll:**

**'Modern, warm, insightful and filled with characters that felt like friends at the end'** **Emma Hannigan**

**'Original, poignant and funny . . . [full of] wit and humour'** **Sheila O'Flanagan**

**'It bubbles and sparkles like pink champagne'** **Patricia Scanlan**

**'Full of warmth, humour and emotion . . . I guarantee you'll love it'** **Melissa Hill**

## The Secrets of Primrose Square Details

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Author : Claudia Carroll

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## From Reader Review The Secrets of Primrose Square for online ebook

### Marjorie says

I am constantly bemused by how well Irish authors manage to convey the human condition so well. this is another in that seam of books that deals with real people, quite boring ordinary people and makes them seem extraordinary. It reminds us all that what happens behind that front door, those closely closed curtains is not necessarily what we would imagine. The bright glow of the TV screen, the subtle hue of a lamp casting it's puddle of light, perfectly normal and yet the events around it may be anything but.

Dealing with four disparate women all struggling with life at different stages, this book brings every day to life and paints it in glowing tones. We first meet Susan, a middle aged woman struggling to get past a tragic event and not dealing with it in the best of ways. Her torment leaps off the page and in to your heart as the true depths of her emotional damage steadily unfold on the page (and this is just in the first chapter). Then there is school girl Melissa, desperately trying to make everyone believe that everything is all okay at home when it is far, far from that. Widowed Jayne looking to reinvigorate her life and not sure how to get out of her rut. Nancy running from her previous life and struggling to find somewhere to settle in a new city, a new country come to that.

The link between these four women is the peaceful Primrose Square in the centre of Dublin City. Slowly it works it's calm magic over them and helps them to reach some sort of resolution to their problems. Not in a completely fantastic, reversal of fortunes way but in a support network way. It is a book that envelops you in a warm hug and gives you hope that no matter how bleak things may seem there is always a brighter day to look forward to.

My only niggles with it where we had to wait an awfully long time to find out why Susan was so adamant that the neighbours son was responsible for her daughter's death. I can understand the need to build tension and it did come out in a relatively believable fashion and only when the character was ready to face up to the events that led to losing her eldest child.

The worst one was waiting to find out why Nancy had felt pushed out of her career and life in London. It is very near to the end of the book when this is revealed and it not something earth shattering in the great scheme of things. Personally shattering and professionally damaging I can see (had this been the real world and not a fictional one) but not as major as she has built it up to be.

The true heart of the book though is the people. They are all beautifully wrought - even relatively minor characters live and breathe within the pages and I did genuinely feel drawn in to the world Ms Carroll has created. It is only my innate nosiness and "need to know" being deferred time and time again that led to me only giving this 4 Stars. It is a joyous read and I would not hesitate to recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading about flawed characters that could so easily be real.

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

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## **Ursula says**

This is a book you can read fairly rapidly because the writing is smooth and natural. It's a story mainly about women of different ages and they are very different from one another. They are not stereotypical so we get to find out more about them as the story develops rather than guessing at first glimpse. What they have in common is that they are all strong women.

Another ever-present character is the author's picture of Dublin itself, an historic and much-loved city.

The lives of the characters, their interactions and their journeys through grief and dilemmas is quite fascinating. The women themselves find each other of huge interest and mostly have good-hearted intentions. This gives a warm feeling which offsets some of the more stark and tragic aspects of their lives. It's always rather lovely when characters we like manage to resolve their situations to achieve the happiness we feel they deserve.

What puzzled me, however, was the use of a technique found more usually in mysteries, with the writer holding back from the reader important parts of a character's background and even some history already well known to many of the characters.

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## **Maureen says**

Household Happenings... Harassing and Happy

Set in Dublin in a set of houses called Primrose Square...with a set of neighbors with extremely interesting lives.

This is a bang up to date book that uses modern phrases, many previously unknown to myself (being as I am a bit of an oldie) but I know now what they are and the meanings, so I have learnt a lot.

This also applies to how teenagers think and why that act as they do.

I so enjoyed reading this book and read it in a couple of days as I couldn't wait to get back to it.

I have never read anything from Claudia Carroll before but this has fueled my appetite for more.

I find it difficult to explain about the story line as I don't want to spoil the story for someone else but I will say that the widow in the story was a source of amusement as she tries to explain to her son and her dead husband's ashes how and why she has a new man in her life that she has met on the internet.

This is a great story thoroughly engaging, sad, funny and highly recommended.

Do read it.

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## **Rachel Hall says**

Although my usual reading matter of choice are crime thrillers, I do have a penchant for Maeve Binchy and her warm, insightful and ultimately uplifting novels set in Ireland and the irreverent humour of Marian Keyes. According to the premise of Claudia Carroll's novel this big hearted tale of female friendship and the lives of those who reside in Primrose Square, Dublin 2 appears to share much in common with these novels. Sadly I found the whole novel pretty laboured and uninspiring stuff that frustrated with its repetition and hackneyed set-pieces, all mined to cringeworthy and highly predictable 'comic' effect. Although the 'secrets' are eminently guessable (pretty obvious), the exact circumstances are eked out painfully over the entire length of the novel which only serves to highlight the plodding pace further.

The beautiful residential Primrose Square is located just off the main thoroughfares of Dublin and is home to a handful of well-maintained Victorian properties set around a community square and children's playground. As a blissfully safe oasis within touching distance of a vibrant city, the properties are highly sought after and the neighbours friendly, but for four ladies residing within the square, the secrets they have long held dear are about to surface and bring them closer than ever before because there is plenty of drama hidden behind their closed doors. The Secrets of Primrose Square is about companionship, friendship and the benefits of a support network in facing the often painful truths which we all encounter at times. Whilst the characters of Jayne, Susan, Melissa and Nancy might appear to be markedly different, all muddling along and dealing with their own problems and hidden concerns, they are far stronger together and they about to find out just what they can confront and achieve between them!

Number 18 is home to the once happy Hayes family but after the death of wilful seventeen-year-old eldest daughter, Ella, and deployment of army husband Jack, to the Lebanon, only embittered, heartbroken and obsessed mother, Susan, and her twelve-year-old daughter, Melissa, remain. Increasing neglectful of Melissa, a burning desire for vengeance and hatred of the teenage boy whom Susan holds responsible for Ella's tragic death is threatening to destroy her remaining family life as she risks a restraining order and the attentions of social services. As Melissa does her best to maintain a semblance of normality at home, reassure the school counsellor and be the responsible adult, her plight is painfully obvious to compassionate, sixty-six-year-old widow, Jayne Dawson, next door at number 19. As Jayne steps in as pretend grandmother to Melissa and offers the young girl much needed love and stability, she too labours under a secret as she muses on the introduction of her Florida based online male 'friend' into her heart and the reaction of her money grabbing son and snobby daughter-in-law to ageing hippie, Eric. Into this mix comes thirty-three-year-old born and bred Londoner, Nancy Thompson, running from a messy past and some very vicious gossip and seeking a fresh start as the assistant director on the forthcoming production of *Pride and Prejudice* at the nearby National Theatre. As the house sitter for a mysterious landlord at the fully revamped and high-spec number 24 at just a fraction of the market price, could Nancy's fortunes have changed for the better? And might the text message attentions of her mysterious landlord ease the pain of her past?

As Melissa, Jayne and Nancy pass into each other lives, first on the fringes and quickly becoming increasingly more involved, they find common ground and unexpected understanding, solidarity and friendship across the generational divide as they support each other and gradually confront their dilemmas. The progression of the unfolding drama does not make for stimulating reading as each chapter offers a snapshot into the lives of the group and gives a sense of their burdens. From behind the scenes with Nancy's demanding theatre luvvies, a high maintenance Spanish director and a bitchy cast, it is all such banal low-brow humour from the off. I had hoped for some insightful moments given the author's previous acting career but alas, originality never seemed on the horizon. The reaction to Eric, Jayne's yoga practising, chakra realigning, long-haired and sandal wearing hippie beau by her son, Jason and daughter-in-law who suspect him of being a gold digger is the stuff of a 1980's sitcom and full of jaded slights against everything new age and Eastern. Susan's inpatient stay at a psychiatric hospital/rehab centre is perhaps the most cringeworthy with group therapy sessions so lacking in emotional sincerity and any modicum of subtlety that they only serve to offend.

I could not relate to any of the women purely because they exist for one sole comic purpose and Claudia Carroll does not bother to furnish them with credible and ongoing lives outside of their allotted niche. They are so far from well-realised creations and due to how flimsy they appear I found even relating to the world painted in Primrose Square impossible. Ella's presence is felt throughout the novel and perhaps, in truth, a little overdone to the point of becoming frustrating, especially given that she is portrayed as one-dimensionally as the rest of the cast with her spirited attitude, feminist views and protest marching dynamism.

Lacking in emotional depth and sincerity, Claudia Carroll does not share Maeve Binchy's eye for credible, humane and realistically flawed characters and her chick lit humour lacks the incisive bite and originality of

Marian Keyes. Disappointing, The Secrets of Primrose Square is unoriginal and overlong with the resulting outcome a predictably contrived and plodding tale of caricatures and tiresome humour. For a superior brand of women's fiction I highly recommend Dorothy Koomson, Lisa Jewell and Jane Fallon.

With thanks to Readers First who provided me with a free copy of this novel in exchange for my honest and unbiased opinion.

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### **Fabulous Book Fiend says**

This book had tons and mystery and intrigue but also loads of heart. I don't want to give away any spoilers so forgive me if I'm a little vague on the details but safe to say I really enjoyed this book and I couldn't work out how things would turn out for our lovely characters until the very end!

I love the fact that we have a book about neighbours as well, setting this in a square and having the neighbours all link together somehow and all be there for each other is such a unique concept but also something that I feel like we've lost of late, I don't know my neighbours but I can hear what they're watching on TV! So while there are some dark aspects to this book dealing with addiction, mental health and grief, there are definitely heartwarming moments in these friendships formed from being neighbours.

I really liked main character Susan, she seems like she's really falling apart in the start of the book but she is aware of that and wants to do something about it and that's what endeared her to me. Her daughter Melissa is a real gem, as keeps being said in the book. I also love when we get to see some of a story from a child/teenagers point of view and this was no exception. She is so open and honest but really brings to light the kind of things that young carers have to go through. They we have Jane and Nancy who are definitely supporting characters but have their own troubles to deal with and weave into Susan and Melissa's story beautifully. I thought that Jane was way too trusting but it really suits her. I would love to hear more about Nancy in future.

Obviously this book is set in Dublin which made for a wonderful change since there are so many books set in English cities or the coast these days, I liked reading a book set in Ireland. The theatre is covered, school is covered and having a partner and father in the armed forces is also covered. I loved the way Internet dating is seen in this book and as I say, although dark topics are included, they are dealt with in a great way. I listened to this on audio because I am a big fan of this narrator and would really recommend doing all of Claudia Carroll's books this way!

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### **Terri says**

A little dose of Irish charm.

Primrose square, is a quiet little get away in the mist of a bustling city. Each home is place of warmth and love and a little bit of that Irish welcome. Filled with non-stop joy of reading through, this novel is going to make you want to laugh and cry along with each of the characters we come to know.

Alternating between the different neighbors of the little square, we come to learn some of their secrets, new loves and new friends through 18,19 and 24 Primrose square.

We come to know about Melissa and the trouble she is going through with her mother and the death of her older sister. We follow through mom's trouble of being able to cope and deal with her daughter's death, left

with unanswered questions, she takes a few wrong turns in life.

And then there's Jayne, the loving older lady who lives next door to Melissa and her family in number 19, a widow after her husband's death a few years before, we get a glimpse in to her life and through her, we met her son and his wife and twin daughters. But most of all, we see how she is like a member of the family to Melissa when she needs someone the most, the loving next door neighbor who is only too happy to help look after the young girl and who we follow on her own little adventure of finding love.

And then we get to meet Nancy who ends up moving in to number 24, renting the beautiful house through a website while she takes on her new job at the theatre nearby, trying to move on with her life after leaving everything and everyone behind her in London. We get to see her struggles and find out her own little secret just like the other ladies of Primrose Square.

Focusing on three households, we come to know the ladies more, we come to love their little quirks and the things that they do as well as learning to cope with their own little secrets, when they just want to try and pretend that everything is okay really.

But in all honesty, *The Secrets of Primrose Square* is a rather charming read that fills your heart with warmth and loss, the joy and laughter of young and old coming together in times of need. It's a book filled with happiness and sadness, lifting you up and holding you down with each character in their perfectly written way.

Kudos to the author who has really driven the image of the square in to our minds, she has created a masterpiece through her writing style and has shown us that things can and nearly always do get better, no matter how hard we may think things can be. With our friends and family behind us, we can almost do anything in the world.

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## **Linda Hepworth says**

Reading dates: 13th/14th July 2018 (Readers First)

The publisher's blurb promises that there are many stories behind the closed doors of Primrose Square, Dublin and this novel follows four main characters. Susan is trying to come to terms with the death, almost a year earlier, of her elder teenage daughter, Ella. She believes that Ella's boyfriend was responsible and spends hours standing outside his house, just watching, even though she is constantly being moved on by the police. Whilst she is obsessed with her vigil, or virtually comatose as a result of her addiction to tranquillisers, her twelve-year-old younger daughter Melissa is trying to keep up a semblance of normality at home. She misses her big sister and would like to be able to help her mother but feels powerless to do so. She also misses her father who is in the army and posted abroad; although she speaks to him every day she feels she must pretend that everything is alright at home, that she and her mother are OK. She has become very good at pretending. Elderly widow Jayne, lives next door and tries to offer whatever support she can to Melissa and Susan but she has recently met someone else and needs to share this momentous news with her selfish son and self-obsessed daughter in law. Nancy is a young, aspiring theatre director who has taken a job in Dublin to escape a scandal in London and lives in fear that her past will catch up with her.

The story follows these main characters as their relationships develop and as each confronts and comes to terms with the challenges and changes they are facing. At its heart it is a story about the power of female friendships, how people deal with personal crises and change, the need for honesty in relationships and the need for people to take risks if they are to move forward. I thought that the author managed to create reasonably credible characters to carry her explorations of family relationships, loss, grief and the mourning process. This was helped by the fact that the story was told from multiple perspectives, a literary device which enabled past events to be revealed in a gradual and, occasionally, surprising way. Although there were

moments when I started to feel that the characters were in danger of becoming stereotypical, on balance I think that the author just managed to avoid this pitfall! There were some enjoyable moments of humour, especially when Jayne had conversations with Tom, her late husband whose ashes were in an urn on a shelf above the television! However, although the cover of the book might suggest this is just a feel-good, light-hearted read, it is in fact a surprisingly thought-provoking and insightful story which explores some dark themes.

With thanks to Real Readers/Zaffre Publishing for a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Shaz Goodwin says**

<http://www.jerasjamboree.co.uk/2018/0...>

I found it so easy to identify with our four main female characters, despite their different stages in life and different circumstances. Susan with her grief and the healing journey she takes; Nancy and her money grabbing family; Jayne who's on the run from something she doesn't want to deal with and my favourite character, Melissa (Susan's daughter). Not only identify but that all important emotional connection I need to feel was there from the beginning.

There's plenty of intrigue that kept me curious and wanting to know more. I do enjoy a story that shares a little information and gets you thinking about possibilities. A couple of things I was sure about in fact I was wrong about! A reminder that things are not always as they seem on the surface ...

The story isn't only set in Primrose Square. I loved everything about the theatre scenes, quite a juxtaposition to the poignancy at the Wellness Centre. The secondary characters in both these settings are fabulous and give solace and companionship as well as light-hearted moments.

Tackling sensitive issues that are associated with a loss of power, Claudia Carroll shows she has a deep understanding of motives and human nature. She has written about these issues so very well, exploring the darker side of emotions and opening the cracks that never lay buried for ever because they need to be talked about and healed. So poignant and heartbreaking but also a glimmer of light even though life has changed.

One not to miss!

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## **Frenchorchidea says**

This is the best book I've read so far in 2018 and by far! This book is very intelligent, very beautiful, full of strong emotions (you sometimes want to cry, sometimes you want to smile, sometimes you feel lovely, sometimes you feel stressed, sometimes you feel angry), this book is also full of wonderful characters living a very charming neighborhood of Dublin where people living there are not only neighbors but also friends. This book is mostly about a mother grieving over her dead daughter and about a sister grieving over her dead older sister. I really liked how we discovered only very far into the book how the girl died and what happened exactly. It gives suspense and tensions to the book. Also it's really really well written. I can only rave about this book!

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## **Rachel Gilbey says**

What an impressive story of women's friendship, of their strength or to borrow a well known 90s phrase - Girl Power! For that is what this is 4 very different females, of assorted ages, all showing their inner strength and courage in assorted circumstances.

There are four main characters and the focus changes between them all. The one thing they have in common is their address is on Primrose Square.

There is plenty I would like to say about the specifics but I think this works better as a book you don't know too much about in advance. It will mean the writing is even more powerful especially in the case of Susan and Melissa's stories.

This is a book that makes me proud to be a woman and the writing deals with a whole host of issues with great compassion. It is a very well written and researched book, and feels like a slight change of direction from the author.

I tend to think of romantic comedy when it comes to Claudia Carroll, but yet this is a book that had me thinking and feeling far more than it did laughing. The Secrets of Primrose Square is a book that needs to be read steadily so that you don't miss anything, as there is a lot going on, and some information is shared really slowly building up not to shocking reveals but ones that make sense in the context of what you have been reading.

Without a doubt its a very good book, and I will be sad to say goodbye to Susan, Melisa, Nancy and Jayne.

Thank you to Netgalley and Zaffre for this copy which I have reviewed honestly and voluntarily.

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## **Margaret Madden says**

4.5 Stars

Review to follow...

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## **Emma Crowley says**

With Claudia Carroll's last book *Our Little Secret*, I felt her writing was venturing in a new direction and I loved it. It was vastly different from her earlier novels, every one of which I thoroughly enjoyed, and I think she is continuing this move with her new book *The Secrets of Primrose Square*. The colourful cover is inviting and makes you eager to venture to a unique little corner of Dublin. You may think upon first judgement of both the cover and title that this book will be all lightness and just nothing but good things will happen for the all the characters but that is not the case. From the opening chapter it's clear that although Primrose Square may be idyllic and yes it does offer comfort and solace and a sense of community and friendship to those that live there all is not as it seems.

Beneath the surface the residents all have issues they are trying to cope with. Some would prefer their business to be kept private and that they keep going the way they are. Others are venturing down new and unexpected paths in life and are eager and excited to see what direction these new choices will take them in.

One thing is for sure with this book Claudia Carroll takes the reader on an interesting journey following three women and a young girl as they face testing and challenging times. All are connected through Primrose Square but little do they realise just how important the friendships and bonds that they form will become for each of them.

The story had a very powerful opening as Susan Hayes stands in the pouring rain outside a teenage boys house. She does this most nights and as she says herself she is 'just an ordinary woman dealing with the unimaginable the only way she knew how'. She has become fixated on this one house because of the person it contains. The guards have been called several times but she just keeps returning. Clearly Susan is not functioning properly and is being eaten up by something she cannot forget. I thought it was brilliant the way we were drip fed the reasons explaining why Susan was in the state we find her in. I could guess parts of it but not until the exact cause was revealed did everything make perfect sense. Susan must have been a challenging character to write about simply because the author had to get the exact tone of her situation and state of mind right. I think Claudia did this very very well. I felt every bit of Susan's anger and hatred and understood why she directed it in the manner she did this but I did question was it fully justified or was it just a coping mechanism? Had she all the answers or was she simply looking to lay the blame at someone else's feet? Susan is consumed by grief at the loss of her older daughter and she wants answers and if you could call it revenge then that too.

Susan presents a front when in contact with her husband Frank, who is away in the army and also to kindly concerned neighbours, Jayne being one of them but to all intents and purposes she is lost and floundering and her life is falling apart. Yes she has at some stages tried to pick up the pieces for the sake of her younger daughter Mellissa who is only 12. But 'there were two many memories at every turn, just waiting to creep up on you, even when you were trying to be brave and not cry and keep the whole show on the road'. Susan is on a path of self destruction and her method of climbing out of the doldrums can only lead to even greater devastation. Dealing with the loss of someone and the ensuing grief is a tricky subject when writing a book but time and time again I found myself nodding along to some of the brilliant writing from Claudia. I went back and reread numerous sentences several times because they just really hit home with me and expressed a lot of the feelings and opinions I myself have felt in the past. This statement being very true in my mind, 'You were expected to keep on keeping on, in spite of the fact your insides felt like they'd been ripped out and splattered up against a brick wall'.

The actions of Susan have repercussions for many and none more so than Melissa. Oh poor, poor Melissa, so young and having to deal with so much. Her father away, her sister gone and her mother away in a world of pain and suffering. How Melissa coped was admirable in one way, trying to keep the whole show on the road and make like normal not even telling people in school the stark, true realities of her situation. The descriptions of trying to keep the house clean or not having enough food to eat were realistic and heartbreaking but I desperately wanted Melissa to be confined in someone. She shouldn't have had to shoulder the burden on her own. She too was grieving and her mother should have been there for her. Melissa wasn't childish and was quite mature for her age but it was great to see that vulnerability coming through in her character and that she needed love, support and guidance just as much as Susan did.

Thankfully in steps kindly neighbour Jayne. She became like the grandmother figure of the book and offered solace and support and made an attempt to get things back on an even keel for the Hayes family. Jayne's own story offered light relief in contrast to the abyss the Susan had plummeted into. Jayne is seeking her own form of happiness, she is coming out of the cloud of getting over her husbands death several years before. The way she goes about it is typical of the dating scene these days and even if she is of the older generation what about it. Although her son Jason and daughter-in-law Irene are more interested in getting Jayne to sell her house rather than accepting that she deserves to be happy and contented. I didn't like either Jason or Irene who had no good intentions at all. OK I understood their hesitancy with regard to Jayne's dating option and what ensues. I felt myself it was a bit dodgy but maybe you shouldn't judge people on first glance rather persist and dig a little deeper. Taking risks may pay off after all but Jason and Irene had only one intention

and they couldn't open up and embrace the fact Jayne was her own woman and perhaps wise beyond her years.

The third woman to feature in this book was Nancy, recently arrived in Dublin to start her new job as assistant director in the National Theatre. She rents a house by pure chance in Primrose Square. The owner unknown but he has always garnered the residents interest. For me Nancy's story was the weakest and I found myself focusing more on Susan, Jayne and Melissa. I knew she was fleeing from a nasty experience in London but I felt it was brushed under the carpet and when revealed it was too late in the book and I was far more consumed as to how things would turn out with the others. As for her interactions with the home owner, I guessed fairly early on what was going on there. I think the book would have worked fine without the inclusion of Nancy but I do appreciate the good effect she had on Melissa and how she helped her work through what her family was experiencing.

'Life has a funny way of going on, no matter how hard you struggle against it'. Yes it certainly does and boy do we rally against things moving forward when we wish everything to remain the same but that can't be possible and in this book Claudia Carroll shows us how it possible to come to acceptance and to heal in some way. A beautiful bond developed between the characters and it made the book a special and engrossing read. There was the dark side to grief shown but also light as to how we can come through the other side. As in 'one day at a time. One foot in front of the other. And you will heal, trust me you have it in you'. Advice we can all take on board. I enjoyed my time spent in Primrose Square, the characters really do get inside your head and get you thinking and experiencing a wide range of emotions. It's definitely a book to curl up on the sofa with and lose yourself in the brilliant story.

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### **Lisa says**

This novel is an engaging account of the lives of four female characters of varying ages. Set in the picturesque and seemingly idyllic Primrose Square we soon find out that all is not as it seems and each resident is hiding various secrets and heartache. The characters within these pages are all relatable and as their stories entwine the force and healing power of a kind-hearted community becomes a pillar of hope for these women creating a feel-good theme. Although I felt the mysteries were a bit long drawn out at times, overall it is an enjoyable read and you'll find yourself rooting for the residents to overcome their dilemmas - can they give each other strength and support to come out the other side?

Thanks to Netgalley and Zaffre for sending me this in exchange for an open and honest review.

Read if you enjoyed:

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### **Jane Hall says**

The Secrets of Primrose Square is set in a fictional residential area of Dublin. Behind the closed doors of the square there are secrets, which of course, will not remain secret for much longer. Susan and Melissa are mourning the loss of young Ella, their respective daughter and sister. Susan blames one of Ella's school friends for her death and has taken to standing outside his house each night as a constant reminder of what he has done. Pre-teen Melissa is worried that she is also going to lose her Mum who is sinking into a deep depression since the death of her elder daughter. Pensioner Jayne is expecting a visitor from the US;

Someone she has never met before, but one with whom she hopes to further develop their online relationship. Her family are not happy though, suspecting their 'inheritance' will disappear as their mother follows her dreams. Nancy has just moved to Dublin from London to work at the National Theatre. She hopes to leave behind bad memories and experiences as she rents a house in Primrose Square, but this is just the start of her problems. I fell in love with Dublin when I visited there a few years ago and since then I have enjoyed a number of books set there, as I can imagine myself walking in the characters' footsteps. For that reason I was really looking forward to reading this book. There is much to like and enjoy about this book. The main characters are all women, and although they all face adversity throughout the novel, they all eventually overcome their demons. Furthermore, they all do it themselves, with the help and support of their friends; none of them have to rely on a man to help them regain their confidence and self respect. There is a huge emphasis on friendship and how strong relationships can help you during the difficult times of your life, and also how good it is to share your successes with your friends. It was interesting to see the different types of challenges that each of the women faced, and how they initially reacted, before taking a positive stand e.g. pretending it wasn't happening; trying to deal with the problem alone; blaming others. At times the story was very moving, and I had the occasional lump in my throat. At other times it is very uplifting and there are some funny moments. The character of Irene, the snobby daughter in law is quite amusing, and I'm sure most readers will know someone like her. However, the book is not without flaws. The book focuses on just three houses within the square; you soon get to know the inhabitants pretty well, and they are sympathetic and generally well drawn characters, although they do descend into caricature at times. Many of the secondary characters were also quite predictable: the warring 'dames' at the theatre; the wronged boyfriend; the antagonistic son bought off by the new boyfriend. The title led me to expect that there would be more than three houses involved in the story. In fact, there is little or no mention of any one else at all from the square. A few extra characters would have given the book a little more variety and depth. Also, 'secrets' is rather a strong word to use. Only one of the characters has something that she is hiding from her neighbours. It seems that the only people in the dark about most things are the readers, due to the device the author uses to reveal a little more of the story each chapter, ending each with a gentle 'cliff hanger'. I have to say that the ending is rather predictable as I had worked out how most of the story lines would end, long before the final reveals. Overall, I did enjoy the book, but I would not rush to read another of Claudia Carroll's books right away.

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## Cathy says

I'll let you into a secret. The Secrets of Primrose Square is not the sort of book to which I'd normally be attracted. I assumed it would be 'chick lit' (although I really don't like that term) which is not a genre I generally read. I know, a prejudice on my part potentially preventing me from reading some great books. However, luckily, I read an extract from the opening chapters of The Secrets of Primrose Square on the Readers First website and found myself immediately drawn to the stories of Susan and Melissa. In return for providing my 'first impressions', I was entered into their weekly prize draw and was fortunate enough to win a copy of the book.

Now let me tell you some secrets about the book itself...

You're going to find Melissa tugging at your heart strings, both because of the situation in which she finds herself and the way she responds to it. You're going to wish you had a neighbour just like Jayne and that when you get to her age you have the courage to do what she does. You're also going to sympathise with her intensely once you meet her son, Jason, and daughter-in-law, Irene. You're going to hope you or anyone close to you never has to go through what Susan is going through. You're going to make some assumptions about some of the other characters that will probably turn out to be wrong. Most of all, by the end of the book, you're more than likely going to feel like you know Primrose Square as if you lived there yourself.

Some of the many things I enjoyed about the book are the way the author creates a distinctive narrative voice for each character, complete with Irish colloquialisms in many cases. I also loved some of the humour. For example, Jason's initial encounter with Jayne's new friend or the catty comments that fly to and fro between the actresses playing Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Mrs Bennett in the theatre production of *Pride and Prejudice* that aspiring theatre director, Nancy, is working on. (It reminded me of the great scene in *The Importance of Being Earnest* where Cecily Cardew and Gwendolen Fairfax swap insults disguised as polite chitchat and Cecily deliberately gives Gwendolen sugar in her tea when she didn't want sugar, and cake when she expressly asked for bread and butter.)

I'll confess that I didn't engage quite as much with the character of Nancy, although the behind the scenes detail of the work involved in a theatre production were fascinating and clearly informed by the author's own experience. The secret that Nancy is trying to leave behind in London by moving to Dublin I found a little underwhelming when finally revealed. However, I loved the relationship she forms with Melissa. If you're anything like me though, it is the central story of Susan and the life-changing event her family have experienced that will keep you turning the pages.

*The Secrets of Primrose Square* is a story of finding a way through grief, the importance of a sense of community, having the courage to make a new start and the precious gift of female solidarity. By turns it is heartbreaking and heart-warming. I would say it's the perfect feel-good read.

I received a review copy courtesy of publishers, Zaffre, and Readers First, in return for an honest and unbiased review.

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