


The Ludlow Ladies' Society

Ann O'Loughlin

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From the bestselling author of *The Ballroom Café* and *The Judge's Wife* comes a new story of friendship, resilience and compassion, and how women support each other through the most difficult times.

Connie Carter has lost everyone and everything dear to her. Leaving her home in New York, she moves to a **run-down Irish mansion**, hoping to heal her shattered heart and in search of answers: how could her husband do the terrible things he did? And why did he plough all their money into the **dilapidated Ludlow Hall** before he died, without ever telling her?

At first Connie tries to avoid the villagers, until she meets local women Eve and Hetty who introduce her to the Ludlow Ladies' Society, a crafts group in need of a permanent home. Connie soon discovers Eve is also struggling with pain and the loss of having her beloved Ludlow Hall repossessed by the bank and sold off. Now, seeing the American Connie living there, the hurt of losing everything is renewed. Can these women ever be friends? Can they ever understand or forgive?

As the Ludlow Ladies create memory quilts to remember those they have loved and lost, the secrets of the past finally begin to surface. But can Connie, Eve and Hetty stitch their lives back together?

Praise for Ann O'Loughlin:

"The Ludlow Ladies' Society brought me to a beautiful place and into a circle of friends that I didn't want to leave. Unputdownable."

KATE KERRIGAN

"A moving tale of loss, love and redemption"

BELLA MAGAZINE on *The Ballroom Café*

"A richly woven tale of passion, conspiracy, hypocrisy and a chilling secret."

SUNDAY INDEPENDENT on *The Judge's Wife*

"An uplifting read, the kind of book you want to gobble up in one sitting."

THE SUNDAY TIMES on *The Judge's Wife*

The Ludlow Ladies' Society Details

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From Reader Review *The Ludlow Ladies' Society* for online ebook

Margitte says

The book starts out with a pity party for women who lost their husbands and are angry, instead of mourning the loss of their soulmates and friends. Instead they mourned the loss of their comfortable homes and money. Apart from that, they also were faced with the embarrassment of the debts left behind resulting in them losing everything. So they cry and cry and cry.

In the center of the drama is Ludlow Hall outside Rosdaniel, a small town outside Dublin in Ireland. The new owner of this country mansions closed off the property for wanderers walking their dogs there and enjoy the extensive gardens as a public park. Everyone is angry at the next meeting of the Ludlow Ladies Society, which is held at the guest house where the American woman who owns the Hall now is in residence until the old gendarme becomes inhabitable again.

I was almost a third into the book by then and ready to just give it up. How much emphasis is still going to be placed on sorrow and heartbreak and emotional extortion of the reader before the reader had enough of it? I got it. So go fast or go away.

Understand and forgive was not quite what the ladies had in mind just yet. The crying continued.

Eve Brannigan used to be married to the previous owner of Ludlow Hall.

Hetty Gorman owns the guesthouse.

Kathryn Rodgers is the chairwoman of the Society.

Connie Carter is the new owner of Ludlow Hall and American.

The ladies, most of them widowed, spend their time quilting and exhibiting and is looking for a place to have their meetings. Apart from that, the American president's wife will be attending an exhibition in Glendalough in Wicklow, and the suggestion is made to make a quilt depicting all facets of life in their own little town for Mrs. Obama to enjoy. A memory quilt it will be. Hetty will do a quilt on her husband Barry's life of serving the community; Eve will make one commemorating Ludlow Hall, from all the beautiful gowns she wore as the hostess to her esteemed husband (who disgraced her with his death); Kathryn will personally oversee the work of Dana, Eithne, Bernie and Rebecca in presenting their town Rosdaniel in their quilts.

Dana has been told by the new owner of Ludlow Hall to make other arrangements for her dogs and to please close the gate when she exits the grounds. The ladies will now appeal Mrs. Carter's decision to deny the town access to her property. They were not happy with Dana and her dogs being ordered off the property and will continue to monitor the situation. Their email correspondence kept everybody in the loop.

The new quilts: there are some serious knots in those colorful threads. It's not that simple. Moving forward, making those quilts will not be that easy. A lot of unraveling of emotions, yes, another river of tears still have to flow, and memories must first happen before the new pictures can be stitched into place on the old fabrics. Cutting up history that turned out to be a never ending mystery. More loose ends constantly are getting exposed, which made the arrangement of the new squares more heartbreaking, more revealing, more impossible by the looks of it. However, the quilts forced the group of friends to address their pasts and accept the challenges of their futures and trusting each other enough to stand together in their grief.

There's one man left in town who could make a difference: Michael Conway. He had all the tools, he knew

everyone and everything, he just needed an opportunity... And another one coming out of the woodwork when least expected.

Understand and Forgive - not so simple words in the end.

So this is a book for women. A cozy read. Enough entanglements to keep you happy. The author of the previous two books, *The Ballroom Cafe* and *The Judges Wife* used her own quilting memories with her mother as a backdrop for this tasteful story.

It's a happy-ever-after, feel-good book for those who dabble in tears and happy smiles simultaneously. A story of hope. An okay read. Yes, a chicken-soup-for-the-soul-read for sure. A very good read if you're in the right mood. It's NOT chick-lit. Well, not exactly. This book focuses on women's issues, marital relationships, and women's friendships. No martinis and high heels present. Yeeha. I guess I am just a little bit over the man-bashing stuff. I feel bloated. Saturated. It gets old.

Try it.

Joanne says

Although I've been aware of Ann O'Loughlin's previous novels and was sure I would like them, somehow I haven't got around to reading any before this, her third novel. And I'm so pleased to say I was right: I loved this book and couldn't put it down.

The storyline revolves around three women and Ludlow Hall. Connie is a New Yorker who has suffered unimaginable loss and has fled to Ireland to live in the run-down Irish mansion her husband had bought without her knowledge. Eve is the former owner of the house who was unceremoniously thrown out due to her husband's debts. Finally, Hetty owns the local B&B and is the widow of Barry, who was very much liked and respected in the local community. The Ludlow Ladies' Society used to meet in Ludlow Hall and is a crafts group made up of lots of local women. They are desperately in need of a new home with lots of space to work on their latest project - memory quilts which they hope will lead to them meeting Michelle Obama as winners of a festival competition.

The first thing to say about this book is that it is a very emotional read. All three of the women have lost their husbands and are coping - or not - in different ways. The three main characters all had suffered loss and so much sorrow. It is hard to imagine how they could come to terms with what had happened in their pasts but their shared stories helped them to bond and support each other. There were many secrets they didn't want to reveal because they were too painful, too humiliating or too private. But by opening up to each other, they begin to heal through the non-judgemental, accepting friendship they offered. The author's beautiful way of writing made feeling all the emotions along with her characters inevitable.

This is also a book about memories, treasuring the happy times and learning to live with unhappy memories. Reading about Eve's button box brought back memories of my Gran's button box which I used to love to play with. I imagine that many people will have similar happy memories. In those buttons were the memories of all the garments they belonged to. In the same way, the fabric used in the memory quilts made by the Ludlow Ladies held memories of people, places and events precious to the individual members and the community.

Towards the end of the book came revelation upon revelation. Some I had guessed at but others took me by

surprise just as much as the characters. Yet nothing seemed out of place or unbelievable. All the parts of the story came together flawlessly to create whole in much the same way as the diverse pieces of fabric came together to make a completed patchwork quilt. The characters seemed very real to me and I shared in their pain, their laughter, their hopes and their healing.

If you haven't read anything by Ann O'Loughlin before - and even if you have - I really recommend you get yourself a copy of *The Ludlow Ladies' Society*. I will definitely be making time to read the author's previous novels and will be looking out for any future books.

Bookread2day says

I have read so many crime books that I have become a little bored. I have started to read women's fiction paperbacks. Since the death of Mr Carter Mrs Carter is going to live Ludlow Hall. It's an old house that has been closed and is as cold as Siberia, seeping with damp that could take quite a bit of time to be ready to live in. Connie Carter is invited to be part of a society named Ludlow Ladies. Will Connie Carter take up the offer and join the other ladies? *The Ludlow Ladies Society* is a story of friendship, compassion, and how women support each other through the most difficult times. I recommend this book with a moving story of loss of a loved one. *The Ludlow Ladies Society* will make a lovely Christmas present for any mother.

Vickie Richens says

I loved this book, devoured it in one sitting, loved the characters, would recommend

Tracy Shephard says

I LOVED THIS BOOK!!!!

The Ludlow Ladies Society is typical of Ann O'Loughlin's style, and clever combination of great characters, perfect plot and emotional grip.

Eve, having lived rather grandly at Ludlow Hall, is now almost scraping together a living by sewing clothes for crass and unstylish women such as Mary McGuane.

Connie after the death of her husband is now the owner of Ludlow Hall and travels to see why her husband loved it so much and what was it's hold on him.

Hetty lets Connie know how disappointed the ladies sewing group was kicked out of Ludlow Hall and they were now looking for other buildings in which to meet with no success.

This book is about grief so deep, you can't seem to face the reality of life, believe me you will shed tears. It has sadness, tragedy but it also brings love and friendship among a group of women bound by a love of each other and a love of sewing.

I loved the descriptive elements of this novel, such as the fact, that Eve's sewing room floor is covered in

cotton.... mine too :) I loved how Connie involved herself with the Ludlow Ladies and how their friendships evolved. They are brought together when making a memory quilt, and here we learn what binds these women together. And like a good quilt stitched with love, these women find common bonds and support.

Ann's knack at creating characters that become real people, whom the reader falls in love with and can identify with is what makes her books so special.

Don't think for one minute this is mushy read, it has parts that make your heart weep at the sheer brutality of human nature. I was at times shocked, I didn't expect the twist that this story gave.

It is beautifully written and truly is one of my absolute favs this year

It really is a wonderful read.

Kate says

The Ludlow Ladies' Society sounded like the perfect read to take on holiday with me, the sort of thing that I could pick up and put down (if I had to) and generally sounded like a nice change of pace from my usual crime reads. But when I started reading this book I realised I had underestimated the pull it would have on me. Soon I was caught up in the stories of these women, invested in each of their heartbreaking tales of hardship and struggles and feeling so connected with this book. Various of the members of the Ludlow Ladies' Society has a secret hidden in their past that they've tried to overcome, or have kept hidden for one reason or another. Ann O'Loughlin carefully lays bare each of their pasts, shares their dark secrets and allows the reader to come to terms with the deep sadness that each of these women has endured. Whilst I found some of the tales saddening, I also felt pride that the women reached forms of closure in order to move on.

The way the sewing group is woven through the book is wonderful, this community of women supporting each other and their friendships and loyalty keeping each other going at times of hardship. The idea that they create memory quilts to commemorate events in their village or the people within it is a lovely one, but some of the memories unearthed are not the most pleasant. The ladies decide to create quilts for the exhibition in the town hall with the first prize being the chance to meet Michelle Obama and show their exhibits at a special show. The emails that are interspersed throughout the narrative with the progress of the group and their task make for some brilliantly funny reading, the chairwoman, Kathryn Rodgers comes across as trying to be professional but failing slightly in her attempts which just makes this even funnier.

On the whole, I found this to be a very enjoyable read and found I was reaching for the tissues occasionally (honest it was my hayfever!), it is a story rife with emotion and spirit. It's the sort of book you read and find you've become invested in the characters, you begin to care what happens to them and care about what has happened to them. When an author can evoke this level of emotion and attachment from the reader then you just know the book is a special one, I will be sure to look out for more books by this author as I enjoyed her style of writing.

Mairead Hearne (swirlandthread.com) says

'A heartwarming tale which will provoke tears and laughter in equal measure'

The Ludlow Ladies Society is the latest novel from Irish author Ann O' Loughlin.

With two bestselling novels already under her belt, *The Ballroom Cafe* and *The Judges Wife*, this is a book that I have been looking forward to reading.

I have to admit, I never paid too much heed to the foreward, afterward or acknowledgement sections of a book, but I have now corrected that. I have discovered some wonderful facts about the author, with, in many cases, the reason and inspirations for writing their novel evident in the words expressed. *The Ludlow Ladies Society* is one such book.

Ann O' Loughlin's mother was a dressmaker and it is with these very special memories of spending time sewing with her mother that inspired Ann to write *The Ludlow Ladies Society*.

Ann stitched a memory quilt with her mother, sharing a passion for sewing and creating something very special physically but also they were creating something very special emotionally...they were stitching memories together.

Isn't that just beautiful??

Connie Carter is bereaved, caught up in a world of grief, where nothing makes sense anymore. Leaving her home in New York, a place she has always loved and enjoyed, Connie heads to Ireland, to the beautiful county of Wicklow, known as the Garden of Ireland. But for Connie, the beauty is not something she can see, as her mind is shut down to all around her. Her husband, recently deceased, had purchased a very old and derelict property, known locally as Ludlow Hall. As to why he chose to invest all their earnings into the premises is unknown to Connie, so she makes the decision to come to Wicklow to check it out.

The house is boarded up with no sign of life, but something about it's old walls call out to Connie and she decides to further investigate it's history in the hope of discovering what is the connection to her husband.

As Connie tentatively checks out her surroundings, she steers clear of the locals, finding their curiosity both intrusive and uncomfortable.

But, as time slowly passes, Connie finds herself opening up a little and is soon befriended by two local ladies Eve and Hetty. They are members of a very special group of ladies who gather together regularly and stitch patchwork memory quilts, known locally as the Ludlow Ladies Society. This group of very special women have formed a unique bond over the years, supporting each other through life's ups and downs.

Eve and Hetty have their own secrets that are deeply hidden but as time passes, these secrets begin to unravel along with Connie's, like a spool of thread, as they discover a little more about each other's past.

The Ludlow Ladies Society is very much a story about female friendship. and the strength of the bonds that develop over time. The women in this story are not unusual and their individual stories could be that of many women, but what makes this story so unique is the way their stories are literally stitched together like the memory quilts they make. There is a very strong theme of sewing in this book which will evoke memories for many who grew up in households where crafting was the norm.

The Ludlow Ladies Society is a book bursting with tenderness and compassion. At times the pages reveal

heartache and pain, but also love and empathy. In reading this book, you will find yourself in the company of a lovely, yet determined and spirited, group of women, while you sip your cuppa and become part of their story.

I expect there will be a surge in the purchase of 'Fat Quarters' and thread, as up & down the highways & byways people rediscover the joy of stitching a quilt. Old blanket boxes will be dusted off as fabric is revealed from generations gone by.....just imagine!!!!

Emma Crowley says

Last year was the first time I had read anything by Irish author Ann O'Loughlin. The Judge's Wife was her second book and although I enjoyed the story it wasn't the best book I had ever read and honestly I didn't understand what all the fuss was about it and why people loved it so much. Now along comes The Ludlow Ladies Society and I hold my hands up and admit I was completely wrong in my opinions regarding Ann's writing and suffice to say I more than get what the fuss and acclaim is all about and all I want to do is add to it and wax lyrical about such a brilliant book that deeply affected me. It proves beyond all doubt for me that when people say give things another chance, that this statement is more than true and I am so glad I gave Ann's books another go for if I hadn't it, such a special book would have passed me by and that would have been a real shame. I know for sure come the end of the year I will still remember this book and it's wonderful cast of characters and the way the themes were dealt with and explored. In the notes before the story begins the author mentions how she was inspired by the sewing and patchwork quilt she made with her own mother and this deep connection and love she felt with her mother is felt throughout the book as the ladies in the society united over making several quilts. Each woman has their own purpose for making a quilt and through this process they begin to heal and come to some form of acceptance given all that has happened in their lives.

I was a bit apprehensive about reading this book given my previous misgivings surrounding the author's last book but thankfully they were easily quashed within the first chapter and I found myself settling into the story quite quickly. There just seemed to be a lovely flow about it, there was a nice pace and there wasn't endless characters being introduced. I've found in several books I have read recently that too many characters are flung at the reader without the reader being given the chance to get to know them and the inner workings of their hearts and minds. In this book there are a group of women to get to know with prominence given to three main characters with each of them having their own harrowing story to tell. One would think given the nature of the book with sewing at its centre that this would be your average chick-lit book so to speak with stitching and bitching where a group of ladies gather to express their woes and get things off their chest. What a relief to discover this wasn't the case at all and it was evident fairly on there was depth and substance to all aspects of the story. One thing I will admit is I prefer the cover I received with all the little pins in various colours on it in comparison to the lady in the water but that is just personal preference and didn't take away from my overall enjoyment of the book. Having finished the book I can see why the above cover was chosen as it ties in so well with the overall storyline and some important scenes.

The writing throughout this book was just beautiful, so raw and honest and there were endless quotes I wished to take down and keep and look back on. I identified the most with American Connie Carter recently arrived in Rosdaniel, Co. Wicklow to look at a property she never knew existed yet somehow it seems to have been left to her. Connie is deeply hurt and totally lost in an all encompassing grief and boy did I feel every bit of her pain, desperation, agony, sorrow and also anger. 'Every day she felt the gouge of pain, as raw as when it was first delivered, the intensity of loss strangling her.' Such raw, heartfelt emotions radiated from

the pages from Connie for the vast majority of the story and I understood every bit of it and so will many people. That's not to say the author made this story all doom and gloom. In fact it was far from it and proved with time and a good support system and something to bond and connect over, grief will never fully leave us but maybe become just that small bit more easier to deal with.

Acceptance I feel is another thing altogether and far more challenging to come by. 'Loss once rooted never dies, pain flares and swells at its own bidding'. These simple few words say so much and ring so very very true. The full reasons behind Connie's grief don't become fully apparent until much later in the book and when it was revealed it was just so shocking and desperately sad that sympathy does not even sum up how I felt for her. OK so there was a certain aspect to her storyline that made me for a short while re-evaluate what I had thought of her but then I thought no I am being too rash and in fact this element although it did come out of nowhere I can accept it given all that Connie had been through. After all if this is how Connie feels every day it's a wonder she can make it through the days. 'Loss streaked through her, making her bend over, the pain clouding her, seeping into her brain, consuming every part of her'. Connie decides to take the hall off the market and stay in Rossdaniel but will the locals like this given Ludlow Hall holds such a firm place in their hearts.

For Eve Brannigan she too is coping with her own loss and the happy days she spent as matriarch of Ludlow Hall and married to Arnold are but a distant memory. Towards the end, times were not so good and yes the memories may have become tainted but still she longs with all her might to live back at the hall. The little house where she now lives and runs a small sewing business is not the same. When she hears an American has taken up residency at the hall she wonders is that it? Will her dreams never become a reality? Eve like many of the characters was far older than Connie yet they were connected by each having experienced loss. Eve was a fantastic character. I felt she was strong and was able to weather the storm and that there was love out there for right under her nose if she was willing to let go of the past and embrace it.

The third woman we focus on is local b&b owner Hetty Gorman. She too enjoys sewing and quilt making, and like Connie and Eve is dealing with the death of her husband, but perhaps she is facing her loss in a different way. I felt there was a great sense of relief on Hetty's part but she was guilty for feeling this. The circumstances behind everyone's loss is different and I think if she told the truth she would feel very exposed and that people would judge her all too readily. As the reader comes to understand what is going through her head I could see why she was so reluctant to share everything as know truly knows what goes on in someone's life once the doors have been shut on the world. Outside appearances and personas can be very deceptive and it's easy for people to put on a show or a façade but at some point the cracks have to show and a weight needs to be lifted. A problem shared is a problem halved.

For years the sewing group had met at Ludlow Hall but once Eve had no choice but to leave the group was forced to meet in living rooms throughout the village. Now that Connie is back and opening up the hall they wonder is it too much to ask could the ladies meet there. They have a huge task ahead as three quilts are being made for a festival and if they win they get to meet Michelle Obama. As much space as possible is needed in order to make the best quilts possible and it's Eve who takes things in hand and approaches Connie and so the Ludlow Ladies Society is born. I enjoyed how it wasn't all plain sailing for the group and that Connie didn't automatically slip into a role within the group so readily. She kept her distance and remained in her own little world of sorrow but bit by bit all the ladies unite and bond over the various patches and their shared grief and in doing so they learn to let in the light, to calm the grief, understand the pain and deal with the all consuming guilt and anger. 'You should snatch happiness whenever it comes knocking, otherwise you will regret it.'

It may seem that this story was a difficult read and it was in some senses of the word it was but dotted

throughout were moments of light relief placed at just the most apt of times. They were almost like little reminders that rays of sunshine can appear in the most difficult of times. The ladies participating in Connie's dance classes brought tears of laughter to my eyes but perhaps one of the best things about the books were the emails. These emails from the chairwoman of The Ludlow Ladies Society -Kathryn Rodgers were hilarious and if the book had just been these emails alone that would have made me perfectly happy so on point were they? Maybe Kathryn deserves a full book of her own? She was so blunt and wasn't afraid to say anything for fear it would upset someone. If it needed to be said Kathryn was the person to do it and I looked forward to reading these tongue in cheek emails whenever they cropped up in the book.

I am so thankful I decided to read more from Ann O'Loughlin because there is sometimes you just 'get' a book and with this one I really did. It really blew me away. There are so many levels to it and I relished every moment of such an exceptional, compelling story. It deserves to top the best sellers list and I'll be keeping an eye on it's progress with much interest.

Sophie says

I've read both of Ann O'Loughlin's previous novels, *The Ballroom Café* and *The Judge's Wife*, and they were both beautifully written tales that captured my heart. *The Ludlow Ladies' Society* had the exact same impact on me. I find Ann's writing is really expressive and meaningful and each book truly feels heartfelt, which only makes me enjoy reading them even more. *The Ludlow Ladies' Society* is about learning to live again, and through the power of friendship, anything seems possible. Not simply sentimental, there are some hard-hitting and shocking moments as well as plenty of humour which made this book a real treat to read.

At the beginning of the book we meet Connie. Her husband has died and whilst she is grieving, she soon learns that he was hiding something from her. Her husband has bought Ludlow Hall in Ireland. As they were living in America and this place in Ireland is something Connie has heard nothing about, she is confused as to what her husband's motives were and why he kept something like this from her. Bravely she leaves her life in America behind to go to Rosdaniel, Co. Wicklow and see the property for herself. Ludlow Hall is not what it once was. It's boarded up, closed down. But Connie sees the opportunity to bring the place back to life – and that's where the Ludlow Ladies' Society comes into it.

At Ludlow Hall, Connie meets Eve and Hetty. All three of these women are trying to deal with their own losses in their own way, and each of them have their own very individual story and background, but they bond together so well. They also all have a love of sewing and quilt making. This is a hobby that, whilst rewarding to actually do, might not sound like the most entertaining to read about but this was such a powerful part of the book. Through sewing, and making patches of a quilt, Connie, Eve and Hetty help each other through the toughest of times. Here they learn to evaluate their grief, understand how it can affect in different ways and that it's ok to feel pain and sorrow but also, that any moments of happiness should be grasped with both hands. For anyone who has felt grief, or is still grieving, I think this is an absolute brilliant choice of book to read. Seeing the way these three women handle their grief really left an impression on me.

I absolutely loved getting to know all three characters, but Connie was just about my favourite. They were all very different and I think Eve came across as the most easily likeable of the three, but it was Connie's character I seemed to warm to the most. Connie has been dealt a real shock at the beginning of the book but I loved how she didn't just sit and wallow, instead going to Ireland to tackle things head on. I really admired how she came through her apprehension and worries about being judged and not fitting in, to the level where she makes such true friends in Hetty and Eve.

I've said it before, but Ann O'Loughlin is a real favourite author of mine. I always look forward to her new book and I don't believe they will ever disappoint. I love the beauty of her storytelling and how each layer of her books is full of emotion and honesty and characters who feel like close friends come the end of the book. The chapters in *The Ludlow Ladies' Society* are quite short and impactful. Because of this and because of how much I was enjoying the book, I never once put it down, something I cursed when the book was over so soon, but it was a real pleasure to read. Full of emotion, secrets, intrigue and friendship, this book has it all and I loved every moment of reading it. I am looking forward to reading the next book by this author, but *The Ludlow Ladies' Society* will prove a difficult one to top!

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I've been looking forward to reading this book for a while now. I have to admit that the cover really took my breath away the first moment I saw it and thankfully the blurb also made me interested in reading the book.

Connie Carter has arrived in Ireland from the United States after losing the ones close to her. The only thing she has left is Ludlow Hall, the property her husband bought without her knowledge. Now she tries to find out the truth about why he bought in the first place, without telling her. Also, she needs to find a place to heal her broken heart. Here, in this small town, she finds her place through two older women, Eve and Hetty who introduced her to Ludlow Ladies' Society. Together they share past pains and together they start to heal.

I found this book to be a beautiful book about friendship and courage. These women have all been through much and I enjoyed learning more about them and most of all I loved reading about how through revealing dark secrets and past pains they were able to move forward. All and all a good book to read. I'm looking forward to reading more books by Ann O'Loughlin.

I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

Yvonne says

Connie Carter has left a life in America to live in the Irish countryside residence of Ludlow Hall. She has lost everything and has to start again and try to make sense of what her life is. Ludlow has been stood empty and is need of love, life and care. Local residents are at first, apprehensive of what this stranger from across the pond will do to their beloved Ludlow. Connie herself is apprehensive of not fitting in and being a stranger in this close-knit community, as she begins to get acquainted with the area she finds a couple of local ladies willing to help. Eve, used to live at the hall and is a member of The Ludlow Ladies' Society along with her good friend Hetty. The Society has a project to make memory quilts for an upcoming festival. During the making of these quilts, secrets, memories, heartbreak as well as good memories and stories will rise and make themselves known. The three women all have previous histories that still haunt them, and it is while the quilts are being made, they will be able to deal with the past and move forward. In doing this they form a strong bond and a friendship, they will need this support more than they know.

You will want to read this book in a day. Once you start it, you will not want to put it down until the very last page has been read and absorbed. It is a beautifully written, heartwarming story of friendship. There are secrets in the lives of the women that are hard to read, it is not a soft story to read. Ann has shown how cruel, vindictive and nasty people can be, but balanced it beautifully, showing the caring and compassionate nature

of people. As you read through the story, you will see how tragedy can be almost too much to bear, it is something that should not be dealt with alone. Also how to move on towards the future, you need to deal with the past and completely leave it behind.

I would highly recommend this book to readers of General and Women's Fiction. It is a book that will creep its way into your heart as you read it. A wonderfully written and beautiful story that had me in tears in several places, and shocked in others. I also think this would make a great choice for Book Reading Groups, as there many things for group discussion contained within this story.

I would like to thank Netgalley, Ann o'Loughlin and Black & White Publishing for my eARC copy of this book. My review is my own honest and unbiased personal opinion.

Jackie Law says

The Ludlow Ladies' Society, by Ann O'Loughlin, is a romance – one of the few genres I avoid. Bear this in mind when reading my review, especially if you are a fan of such stories. I am aware that there are many who enjoy the escapism of the happy ever after. Of all imaginative possibilities this is one I struggle to suspend reason for, even to facilitate story telling.

The tale is set in the small Irish town of Rosdaniel, County Wicklow. The town's big house and its estate had been occupied by generations of the Brannigan family until a few years before. Financial mismanagement led to repossession and Ludlow Hall was bought by an American who subsequently died. Now his widow, Connie, has arrived hoping to discover why her husband sank their money into the property without telling her. The town still regards Ludlow Hall as the home of Eve, who was evicted by the banks when they acted to recover the debts her husband bequeathed.

Another widow in the town, Hetty, makes up the trio of women forming the backbone of the tale. All have tragic personal histories that are slowly revealed. The women come together thanks to the eponymous society that regularly meets to gossip and sew quilts. The women plan to enter their creations in a competition, the winners of which will have the opportunity to meet the American First Lady when she visits Ireland in just a few weeks time.

Eve is introduced as a seamstress who is unkindly judgemental about her clients. Finishing off the hemming on a skirt she ponders:

“Mary McGuane would hardly do it justice with her thick waist [...] The red colour was too bright for a heavy woman.”

That larger woman should not be permitted to wear whatever they want did not endear Eve to me. Much later in the book Hatty appears to have similar concerns about appearance when Connie is preparing to meet an old friend:

“Last week she had gone to Arklow on Hetty's insistence and had her hair coloured and cut.”

Given the trials and tribulations these women have suffered, and the strength they have shown in surviving and moving on, such superficial concerns diminished their supposedly supportive female friendships. After the emotional abuse their husbands subjected them to as a means of control it would have been refreshing to

have them accepted just as they are.

There is much death and darkness in the story; the women have been badly used by their spouses. With this in mind I wondered why they would seek a replacement, why they would believe happiness could be found with another man. They cite love yet also recognise that they once loved those who caused them pain. This is the main flaw I find in romantic fiction, the lack of learning from experience.

The Ludlow Ladies' Society is making quilts for the competition. When they decide the theme is to be memory they set aside their off-cuts and seek clothing donations with a personal history. Eve and Hatty in particular cut squares from high quality clothes that could have benefited others which seemed such a waste. I struggled to empathise with much of this tale.

The writing flows and the progression of the plot is well measured. The reveals maintain interest despite there being few surprises. For romance fans, especially those who enjoy crafts such as sewing, I suspect this could be an engaging read. As it was voted onto the Not The Booker Prize shortlist I did my best to remain open minded but it was not a book for me.

My copy of this book was provided gratis by the publisher, Black & White Publishing.

Gaele says

Ludlow Hall, outside Dublin in the village of Rosdaniel is the centerpoint of this story: inherited from her husband Connie, she'd never heard of the place, nor been to Ireland in her life. Curious and without anything else, Connie heads to the Hall hoping to discover why it was purchased and get answers to questions she never knew needed asking. Told in multiple points of view from four women, each with their own curious ties to the hall, and with the exception of Connie, all members of the Ludlow Ladies Society – a group that gathers in various homes to quilt and chatter. With the arrival of the First Lady, Michelle Obama, the ladies have decided that they will present a quilt that tells the story of their lives in the small town.

I'll admit, this story started out feeling very disjointed, with multiple POV's sharing moments and memories, often dancing on the line of self-pity and anger at the changes brought in the years that have passed. With tales from women whose lives were integrally linked to the Hall, and Connie's struggles to discover just why she's found herself involved with it – the development of the story is a gradual one. Not a read in one sitting story – their revelations are often heartbreaking, and you can't help but hope that their lives turned for the better, even as their initial introductions don't always feel as if that is possible. Slowly as their display quilt is pieced together, each scrap of material adds layers to the story, showing the often unexpected ways in which these lives have intersected or paralleled, bringing them each to this point. Ultimately, this is a story of possibilities redefined and rebuilt with time, friendship and recognition of their similarities, highlighted by their differing approaches and personalities that make their friendships, and the quilt, a testament to their lives and struggles brought together to make a singular object that requires each give and share of themselves.

I'm not quite sure what I was expecting initially from this story, and I'll admit that my expectations and fascination with each of the characters also tended to change and develop as things progressed, but I did find that my initial struggles with the slow pace as information and clues to each person wasn't immediately relevant, but the journey was well worth the time. Read over a five-day span (a rarity for me) by the time I was half-through the book, I wanted only to return and discover more.

I received an ebook copy of the title from the publisher via NetGalley for purpose of honest review. I was not compensated for this review: all conclusions are my own responsibility.

Review first appeared at I am, Indeed

Eva says

The Ludlow Ladies' Society is a truly beautiful story about love and loss, but above all of compassion, friendship and the strength and resilience of women.

Connie moves into Ludlow Hall after leaving behind devastating events in America. Her late husband has spent all their money on the house without her knowing about it and now she wants to find out why.

Eve is the former owner of Ludlow Hall. She was forced to leave her home when the bank foreclosed on it. And then there's Hetty, also a widow, who still hides a secret about her husband.

The Ludlow Ladies' Society, of which Eve and Hetty are members, comes together to create memory quilts for an exhibition that will be attended by Michelle Obama. Soon secrets are shared and mysteries will be solved but more importantly, friendships are formed that will change these women's lives. I loved getting to know each and every one of these characters.

I found this novel to be absolutely heartwarming and sometimes I felt it was so incredibly heartbreaking that I actually reached for a tissue. (Totally blame the hormones!) But there are also a few chuckles. These ladies will worm their way into your heart and they made me proud to be a woman. I envied this warm circle of friends and wished I could be a part of it. Each in their own way is an inspiration, putting their own grief aside to care and show compassion for someone else.

Karen says

American Connie Carter is the new owner of the repossessed and boarded-up Ludlow Hall, not through choice but by way of inheritance. Life has not been kind to her at all and in trying to find a way to deal with her pain she moves from America to Rosdaniel in Ireland intending to live in Ludlow Hall, a property bought by her husband and which she knew nothing about. Preferring to be alone with her memories she initially shuns company and tries to avoid the gossips but her private and sometimes aloof manner doesn't go down well with some of the locals and it is down to some of the Ludlow ladies to hold out the hand of friendship.

The Ladies Society are a diverse group of women – the rather bossy and forceful Chair Kathryn tries to keep them in line – some of her emails are hilarious and provide a great source of humour. Widow Eve Brannigan, (known by some as 'Mrs Ludlow' as the former chatelaine of Ludlow Hall) has also had a poor hand dealt to her but despite this she can find the capacity for much empathy and compassion for others. Eve was one of my favourite characters and I was longing for her to find some happiness. Her button box resonated with me. My late grandmother used to have a tin full of buttons which I remember playing with as a child (and which I still have). Hetty, who runs the local guesthouse is another of the women whose public and private lives were very different. Eve and Hetty do their best to befriend Connie and try to get her to start living again, rather

than just existing.

It is whilst the ladies are making memory quilts for an exhibition to be attended by Michelle Obama that the full extent of their history and secrets are revealed. Each square of material on the quilts has come from fabric or clothing that has a special meaning for the person who donated it. As they sew they are putting their heart and memories into the quilt and they use it as a way of exorcising their sadness.

There is much heartache here but at the same time it is such an uplifting story of friendship. The storyline covers some darker issues – all subjects which are not readily talked about but which nevertheless cause so much pain and anguish to those involved. Their inclusion is not gratuitous by any means but gives substance and depth to the characters, all of which are so well drawn. You can't help but hope that life has something better in store for them once you know their history. There are some surprises in store for the reader and I certainly wasn't expecting the way that some threads linked together.

Many years ago, I used to devour novels by the late Irish writer, the fabulous Maeve Binchy. The Ludlow Ladies' Society very much reminded me of Maeve's books – for that wonderful community setting, its strong female characters and humorous and emotional storylines. I thoroughly enjoyed this lovely story; it's fairly short chapters make it a book that you can fly through and the characters are a joy to get to know. Definitely recommended.
