



## **The Art of Unpacking Your Life**

*Shireen Jilla*

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### OLD FRIENDS, NEW LIES

Twenty years ago, they were the best of friends. When Connie invites her university gang on the holiday of a lifetime, a safari in the Kalahari, they have little in common anymore. Is getting them back together a terrible mistake?

Connie is lonely. With her children at secondary school and an ambitious MP husband, who is regularly adulterous, she is searching for her own purpose in life. She feels insecure next to Sara, a driven, defiantly single barrister, and has conflicted feelings towards her old flame, the freshly-divorced Luke, whose own secrets threaten to overwhelm him.

Despite the undercurrent of tension, they are drawn into the adventure and begin to enjoy each other once more, a million miles away from their daily concerns. They finally have space to explore what really matters to them. But a series of events and revelations bring new challenges to the group.

Conservative lawyer Matt doubtfully confides he is having a surrogate baby; Sara questions her own professionalism as her latest murder trial comes under scrutiny; Daniel discovers his yearning to buy land and put down roots, which his partner Alan does not share, and Lizzie struggles with feelings of jealousy that are closer to home than is comfortable for anyone.

As their lives start to unravel, they see how they are all linked together. New relationships are formed, old ones run their course, and more news from home brings further tragedy.

Can the stark beauty and calm of the Kalahari help them rediscover the friendship that binds them together? Will they all make it back to London in one piece?

## The Art of Unpacking Your Life Details

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Author : Shireen Jilla

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## **From Reader Review The Art of Unpacking Your Life for online ebook**

### **Christine Lussier says**

I received a digital copy from NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

The Art of Unpacking Your Life could definitely be a "summer must read". Connie invites her dear college roommates/friends to celebrate her 40th birthday at her grandfather's reserve. Over the course of the week, many hidden truths come out, as well as more drama than one could foresee.

The story will make you laugh, become frustrated, sigh & cry. Enjoy~

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### **Melissa says**

Another book that you can get lost in. With a great, engrossing plot and wonderful, memorable characters this is sure to be a hit with many, if not all readers. If you like Women's Fiction is a must read.

I was given this book in exchange for an honest review via NETGALLEY.

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### **Heatherly Hardin says**

An amazing adventure through the wilds of Africa and the lives of friends reunited for a 40th birthday celebration. The celebration reveals secret attractions, tensions, hopes, fears, and culminates with unexpected tragedy. A definite page turner.

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### **Marisa says**

My thanks to Netgalley and publisher Bloomsbury Publishing Pic (UK and - ANZ) for the digital copy to review.

Fantastic read. I thoroughly enjoyed this gripping and very emotional read by Shireen Jilla. I have no hesitation in recommending this novel as categorized to all Readers of women fiction. The characters were well written and built up extremely well where you feel you get to know them very well as individuals.

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### **Wally says**

What 'drama'. Just too much for one book. I understand that the author was getting us to think about what is termed 'mid-life crisis' and that could be an interesting thought to pursue, but to think that a group of BFF from college (some of whom have stayed closely in touch and others not as closely) would go on a holiday

from London to South Africa to celebrate one of their friends 40th birthday and then that each of them would have some major life-changing experience while they were together is simply beyond belief. Having said that, the descriptions of South Africa were absolutely magnificent and reading about their safari made the book enjoyable.

NetGalley gave me a copy of this book for my honest feedback.

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### **Nada says**

The Art of Unpacking Your Life by Shireen Jilla follows a tried and true formula for women's fiction. The book is an entertaining but mostly predictable story in a beautiful setting. True to form, by the end, each person and each relationship reaches a point of resolution. The ending for some of the characters is not entirely satisfying, but it does tie up all the threads of the book.

Read my complete review at <http://www.memoriesfrombooks.com/2016...>

Reviewed based on a publisher's galley received through NetGalley

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### **Amy says**

Connie invites her university friends on a trip to the Kalahari to celebrate her fortieth birthday. The story mostly centers on Connie. The other friends have side-stories. The novel is a sharp and rich depiction of college friends in later life. "They had been close at university, but their friendship had drifted as their lives had taken them in different directions." Do they have the same bonds as they did at 20 that they have now not seeing each other daily? Over several days in a vast environment thousands of miles away from their comfort zone and homes, the group reveals secrets and encounters surprising challenges.

Connie's four children ["No one had four children anymore."] are in secondary school and her politician husband Julian continues to have affairs. His latest dalliance might break them up forever despite the family and image to uphold. For years after every affair, Connie stands by her man. Sara is a single, strong barrister who just completed a major case in London and prefers to keep men at arm's length to avoid any emotional entanglements. "There was something fundamentally wrong with the men she dated. Too talkative, too vain, too stupid, too nasal, too egotistical." Lizzie isn't quite sure what to do personally or professionally. "Nothing measured up to their time together at Bristol University for Lizzie. She hadn't moved on." Lizzie "didn't have a man, or own her own flat and her career was going nowhere." The recently divorced Luke, Connie's college boyfriend is on the trip. Is there still something between them? Should they have remained together all along? Matt shares the news that he and his American wife Katherine ["She was fragile and feminine compared with his English women friends."] used a surrogate for the baby they're expecting after years of IVF treatment. Dan isn't happy in his relationship with a younger, not-too-serious boyfriend Alan. "The group never believed that Alan was good enough for Dan."

Jilla writes splendidly about the bold wildlife and African landscape—"A wide, wild range of beautiful, even rare and endangered, species would be waking up in this safe haven, magically far away from the destructive nature of the human world. All because of her grandfather's understanding and commitment." It's refreshing to read about adults who may still be figuring things out. The superb writing and multifaceted

characters draw you in from the beginning and keep you riveted throughout the novel.

published at <http://entertainmentrealm.com>

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### **Alyson says**

This was ok, although at first the myriad of characters that are introduced rapidly in the first couple of pages was a bit confusing.

I found it difficult to believe that so many events/incidents/revelations would happen in the space of about 5 days to one group of people, but on the whole the plot kept me going.

I didn't find Connie a very convincing person.

One picky point - there was a line which read "They drove through a locked gate in the boundary fence." (p24). Really? How did they do that? Did they drive straight through it and smash it to bits?

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### **Beth Peninger says**

2.5 stars

Thank you to NetGalley and Bloomsbury Publishing for this free readers edition. In exchange I am providing an honest review.

Hmmm. I am conflicted about this book. I was bored with the story for about the first half and then the second half picked up its pace, in my opinion.

Connie and her longtime group of friends are in Africa on safari for her 40th birthday. They have significant others with them, if they exist, and they are all dancing around one another and the little secrets that have built between them in the last 20 years. Some of the secrets are more just things not discussed, like Connie's husband who has multiple affairs and everyone, including Connie, knows about them. The week spent together in Kalahari will serve to expose secrets, reveal truths long denied, and unearth the core of who each is as a person. It will be a chance to cast off regret from past decisions and to look forward to what could, and perhaps should, be. Two scenes stand out to me as poignant, a stand up and a fly over. You'll have to read the book to discover those scenes for yourself.

Jilla takes the milestone age of 40 and takes the reader on a journey of unpacking a life lived thus far. As humans it is natural for us to do some reflecting at some stage of our life and milestones seem to be the most common times to do so. A life in review, so to speak. Sometimes what we discover surprises us, other times we find we are not surprised at all.

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### **Guto Harri says**

Pacy, profound and thought-provoking reflections on the key dynamics and personal characteristics of a group of friends that will be be unnervingly familiar to all of us. Set against a stunning backdrop, the cross-currents of conflict could ultimately happen anywhere

Love it

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### **Kimberly says**

The Art of Unpacking Your Life by [Jilla, Shireen]I was given this book by NetGalley in exchange for my honest review.

Connie invites her friends from college to a safari in the Kalahari. There were friends, but that was 20 years ago. Within a short time, they begin to enjoy each other, even though there is tension. Throughout the trip challenges occur which makes them see that even though time has passed there is still a link between them.

This book about friendship is written by a talented Shireen Jilla. It played on my emotions. At time I was cheering on the friendships, at other times I wanted to pull a character aside to let them know they should hang on to special people.

It was a very good book and I look forward to reading more of her books in the future.

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### **Pamela says**

I read it was like The Big Chill - that made me want to read it. The characters all have their pros and cons - problems and wants. It was ok - I did care about the characters and it was a fairly quick read. Not a great novel but pleasurable and a good read while hibernating from all the snow outside.

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### **Melinda Brasher says**

This book definitely has an interesting setting, well-detailed and absorbing, and I enjoyed reading about the characters' safari adventure (though I'm not sure how realistic it all was).

The writing felt a bit unpolished to me. There weren't excessive typos or other actual errors, but some words were used oddly, like "stated" as a tag for commands or other non-statements. The many constructions along the lines of "Lizzie was jealous" and "Matt was irritated"—especially while in those characters' points of view—came across as "told." The time jumps and POV switches were often not worked in well enough to prevent the reader from feeling jarred. Many of the sentence fragments weren't powerful enough to justify being fragments. I also could have done with a lot less description of who walked where in the room and what every single character's reaction was to an event.

However, the writing also had its beautiful moments and could be quite evocative emotionally.

Too many characters were introduced right together at the beginning. It was confusing and awkward, and even halfway through the book I'd sometimes have to stop and think who was who because of this. I did enjoy how the characters' lives had all become so different since their years at university, and their relationships were interesting to watch.

As for the realism of the safari, I think they saw too many animals too quickly at too close of range. If

I'm wrong, I really, really want to go to the exact place they went. And I'm not sure how much time you'd have to talk, move, and think while a rhino was charging 20 meters. Twenty meters isn't very far for an animal that big, and rhinos are faster than you'd think. But it was fun imagining it all.

The surprise at the end felt forced to me, as did the number of unrelated things that changed dramatically in the characters' lives over the course of a single week, but overall it was engaging enough to keep me reading, with good conflict and pacing.

More accurate rating: 3.5

\*I received a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.\*

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### **Tucker says**

This is what women's fiction should be! Fascinating characters, engrossing plot, great setting – it's all here. A really good read.

Thank you to Bloomsbury and NetGalley for an advance copy of this book.

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### **Chaitra says**

I like this type of book. By which type I mean, a bunch of people thrust together for a short period of time. I like the dynamics that come into play during such a time, when people usually fail to keep their emotions and/or ego in check. It was a reason for requesting the book on NetGalley. The other being that it's set on a safari in an African desert/bush. And it was mostly satisfactory. It's not especially great literature, but it certainly isn't bad.

A couple of things - it might be that I had different expectations, but the friends were a bit too saintly towards each other. Granted, they're the best of friends, but it's weird how they don't get on each other's nerves at all. The only person who at all shows some jealousy does it because it's her trait. She grows out of it really quickly. All their crises have external triggers.

I was also unsatisfied with the ending. A major event towards the end seemed to come for no reason. Or, for the express purpose of having Connie not face the decision of booting her husband out, even after all that. Her arc is to start a foundation? I would have expected Connie to already have participated in such forums. Speaking of, I couldn't respect her. I wouldn't say this if the book didn't make repeated mentions of her strength and bravery, but I didn't think that turning a blind eye to her husband's many, many affairs constituted strength. Only avoidance.

I still liked the book, but I would have liked it more if the above points were addressed in a better fashion.

*Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for providing me with a copy of this book, in return for a review.*

