



Life Skills

Katie Fforde

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Athletic, outdoor type, good cook, good with people, wanted for work on the canals....

Newly not engaged and suddenly out of work, Julia Fairfax needs a new direction. The classified ad that catches her eye sends her on a delightful, hilarious adventure along the English canals on a rickety old hotel boat. Among the twists and turns, Julia encounters a passel of persnickety guests, an irritating ex-boyfriend, the challenges of cooking in a galley kitchen the size of a closet, and a whole lot of rattling tea cups. Add some frighteningly narrow bridges to steer through, and you've got the makings of an unforgettable journey.

Part romp, part romance, part step-by-step guide to how *not* to see England's scenic canals, *Life Skills* will delight fans of intelligent romantic comedy, as well as anyone looking for a few tips on staying afloat.

Life Skills Details

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Author : Katie Fforde

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Karen says

If I wasn't reading this on an iPad I would have thrown it on the ground numerous times. This is the second Katie Fforde I've read and unfortunately it's worse than my first. It's really made me wonder why Katie Fforde is so popular. Once again, there is a promising start due to a good premise and interesting setting. But the relationship of the main couple makes no sense to me. Julia hates Fergus because he was mean to her when they were kids. They meet up as adults - she still hates him - they hardly speak to each other, and yet he kisses her passionately when he leaves her group after a few days!? There was barely a longing glance to forewarn that he has a thing for her, so the kiss seems more like harassment than romance. It does get better in the second half, but I think I am starting to see a pattern of poor relationship development in her books.

Mel says

I enjoyed the first two thirds of the book much more than the last third. Julia's life changing decision and new path becomes conventional and boring. I was extremely frustrated by the lack of depth for the male protagonist who is seemingly perfect but the reader never fully knows.

Sarah Amin says

The romantic plot of this book was so similar to paradise fields, I was almost ready to give up on author. However, the library is on short supply of authors that I really enjoy, so I'm going to give her one more try. Hopefully it won't be another, quick romantic rendezvous and regret it situation.

Michele says

I love Katie Fforde's books. Yes, they are chick lit. They are fun, they make you laugh, they end up with a happy ending, but that is in spite of the characters, not because of them. Ms. Fforde manages to make her women funny but not silly, smart in most ways, but quite obtuse and obstinate in others. The characters are enjoyable, endearing and entertaining.

Marty says

Mi tocca ammettere che tra i libri che ho letto recentemente della Fforde questo è attualmente quello che mi è piaciuto di meno.

Nonostante la storia della protagonista e di come voglia rivoluzionare la sua vita e allontanarsi da tutte quelle persone che la credono essere in età troppo matura per non essersi mai sposata, sia piuttosto avvincente o intrigante mancava qualcosa.

Ho sicuramente amato il protagonista maschile, Fergus che a causa di qualche stupidaggine risalente ai tempi

in cui era bambino deve passare il tempo a scusarsi.

In realtà il formidabile uomo ora è diventato un archeologo e sembra del tutto intenzionato a dare una mano dove può, senza secondi fini o orgoglio ma con molto brio e qualche battuta che strappa sempre un sorriso. Quello che penso di non aver amato troppo in questo libro alla fin fine è la protagonista, Julia. All'inizio sembravo capirla, capire le sue scelte e le sue decisioni nonché l'insofferenza verso tutti quelli che la trattavano come un attempata ma ben presto ho iniziato a perdermi.

Di certo non riuscivo a motivare il suo comportamento nei confronti di Fergus che mi ha lasciato con l'amaro in bocca per gran parte del libro né le sue decisioni quando la sua vita cambia di nuovo del tutto e non vuole coinvolgere l'uomo che avrebbe tutto il diritto di sapere.

Nonostante questo però ho molto apprezzato Susy che passa dall'essere una ragazzina viziata a una donna adulta e responsabile che sa bene come manipolare il padre, a fin di bene, e lo zio Ralph che è stato simpatico dall'inizio alla fine.

Ammetto che mi è dispiaciuto un po' per Jason, chissà come mai mi aspetto sempre che i personaggi siano sempre simpatici o almeno ... avrei voluto che lui lo fosse.

Per il resto un altro libro condito di tutto l'ambiente inglese che uno potrebbe desiderare anche se questa volta visto da dei canali e da dei fiumi inglesi.

3,5 stelline!

Pamela says

This is my third Katie Fforde and I found it really disappointing. I got it so that I'd have something quick and light to read on the train to Chicago and I found I had a hard time getting through it. The premise was appealing and the book began promisingly enough: newly single thirty-something takes a job on a hotel boat on the English canals for the spring/summer. But then it devolved into chick-litty throwback fauxmance (I say fauxmance because the romance seemed so contrived). What bugged me the most was that the main character continually railed against the old-fashioned and patriarchal values of her ex-fiancé and her mother--and presumably her new love interest whose ex-wife left him because she "selfishly" didn't want to give up her career to have babies--but then fell right into them when she found herself "undone." She never effectively stood up to the holders of those attitudes and her mother et al never evolved in their views. Worse still, those views are ultimately, if tacitly, validated.

Vel says

Posh tosh that sinks like a stone...

This was the first of Katie Fforde's books I have read. Having been recommended her books by several people, as well as having read some rave reviews by other Goodreads members I was looking forward to discovering and enjoying her books. I thought reading about the sea-change to Julia's life and career - from a high-flying Oxfordshire estate agent to a cook living and working on a canal boat earning peanuts – would make for an interesting read, but I think I chose the wrong book for my first...

It was sadly a disappointing read that gave me far less enjoyment than I first expected. The earlier chapters were actually alright and definitely the most enjoyable, but as the story sailed on I found myself enjoying it less and less right to the end (if at all). I could not wait to escape this sinking boat of a book and put myself

out of my misery.

I found that, at best, a lot of the characters were not particularly likeable and irritating. I thought Julia was a rather boring protagonist and certainly no heroine – I often found her to be horribly selfish and spoiled, treating some undeserving people like crap. She has still not really grown up, does not do things because it is what her mum 'wants', and does not know what she wants from life. She was incredibly annoying – primarily because she changes her constantly changes her mind about how she feels about people and situations. I often felt I would have preferred to have read Suzy's own story. The worst characters of all (Oscar and his vile mother Mrs Anstruther) could be hellish, and this sometimes made for unpleasant reading (not what I expect from chick-lit, as you'll see later). I also had a problem with the inconsistent structure and poor plotting – it either jumped from one event or feeling to another so suddenly, or repeated parts over and over again to the point where I knew almost word-for-word what would happen.

For a short and light read, 'Life Skills' is too much of a drag, with too few 'feel good' moments and, surprising twists.

I also found the views of individuals such as the Anstruthers and questioned the credibility of the apparent attitudes of the modern society portrayed – granted, the story focuses on privileged people with conservative attitudes, yet it often felt like reading a book set in the 1950s (especially since I assumed it to be set around the time of publication, in 1999?)

But, now, let's not be too harsh. After all, 'Life Skills' is harmless, sweet chick-lit, right?

What this book does have in common with this genre is that it is merely light rubbish you'll forget as soon as you've finished reading. But compared with the other popular authors of this genre I enjoy reading, it was still disappointing even for chick-lit. What I particularly love about occasionally indulging myself in this genre (which is not my number one favourite, either) is that it is a delicious literary sweet-treat - often making for a highly-addictive, quick read that you start to love quickly and continuously, can't put it down and subsequently read in a few sittings. This is everything I love about reading chick-lit. However, I can honestly say I find it difficult to think of a single chick-lit novel I've read in my life (and I have devoured many!) that haven't met at least some of this criteria. Sadly, 'Life Skills' failed to meet any of it.

A review from a popular women's lifestyle magazine detailed on the blurb reads: "the perfect summer read". I feel a more accurate description is "the perfect load of tosh".

Laura Elisabeth says

I was disappointed by this book. I expected a fluffy, funny read with an undercurrent of class and gender tensions, but instead got a rather sloppy, superficial read with inconsistent characters and tone. The plot hits what seems to be a natural ending half-way through and then drags on for many more chapters. I feel that it does not provide a satisfying romance or picture of modern single women.

Lisenstein says

spoiler alert

Julia ist Mitte dreißig, erfolgreich und trägt Konfektionsgröße 40. Sie kündigt ihren Job, da sie bei einer

Beförderung übergangen wurde. Nahezu gleichzeitig wird ihr außerdem klar, dass sie ihren Verlobten Oscar gar nicht liebt (sondern dessen Hund) und trennt sich schnell von ihm. Da Julia jedoch nicht ewig von ihren Ersparnissen leben kann und ihr der Sinn nach Abenteuer steht, heuert sie als Köchin auf einem Hotelschiff (pardon, es sind zwei Schiffe und diese Bezeichnung wird ihnen kaum gerecht) an. Denn natürlich ist Julia eine wahnsinnig gute Hobbyköchin. Der Hotelkutter gehört der wunderschönen Suzy, Mitte 20, wahnsinnig schön und wahnsinnig naiv, die endlich zeigen will, dass sie auch ohne Daddys Geld zurechtkommt und etwas Eigenes auf die Beine stellen will. Julia und Suzy werden gute beste Freundinnen und kriegen das mit dem Hotelkutter überraschend gut hin.

Dramatisches Ereignis: Fergus taucht auf dem Boot auf. Fergus und Julia kennen sich seit Kindertagen, denn ihre Mütter sind gute Freundinnen und haben sich schon immer gewünscht, dass die Sprösslinge einander mal heiraten. Doch das Moppelchen hat eine unbändige Wut auf den Sandkastenkameraden, denn der hat sie als junger Bube häufiger geärgert und ihr sogar einmal eine Spinne aufs Bein gesetzt. (!!!) Sie ist deshalb freilich ziemlich ekelhaft zu ihm, wohingegen er sehr charmant und hilfsbereit ist. Aber natürlich weiß Julia, dass das alles nur Tarnung ist. Schließlich hat er ja als kleiner Junge...! Julia geht zwischendurch spazieren und Fergus kreuzt ihren Weg. Sie stürzt sich auf ihn und es kommt zum Liebesakt auf offenem Felde, na klar. An Verhütung hat die dralle Julia nicht denken können, die Lust war einfach so groß. Fergus verschwindet wieder und die Hotelkutterei geht weiter wie bisher. Allerdings ist Julia jetzt schwanger, natürlich von Fergilein. Der darf von seinem Vaterglück aber nichts erfahren, weil... Ja, warum eigentlich nicht? Er erfährt es dann aber doch, unsere Julia möchte ihn allerdings nicht an der Schwangerschaft teilhaben lassen, denn das würde er ja nur aus einem Verantwortungsgefühl tun und das braucht Julia ja wohl ganz und gar nicht. Heiraten darf er sie auch nicht, denn das würde er ja nur wegen des Kindes wollen und nicht wegen ihr. Ja, Julia nervt ganz schön.

Schließlich gipfelt das Drama in der unsäglich peinlichen Geburtssequenz. Julia sieht der Geburt zuerst sehr skeptisch entgegen und beschließt, sich alle Schmerzmittel der Welt verabreichen zu lassen. Aber dann kommt es doch ganz anders und sie bringt plötzlich voller Glücksgefühle ganz natürlich ohne irgendwelche medizinischen Hilfsmittel (Fforde reitet darauf regelrecht herum) Fergus junior zur Welt. Das ist ja auch das beste für Kind und Mutter. Fergus soll bei der Geburt erst übrigens unter keinen Umständen dabei sein, steht dann letztlich aber doch in Position, starrt zwischen ihre gespreizten Beine und ruft aus, dass er Haare sehen kann. Julia ist dafür, dass sie Fergie junior ZUSAMMEN auf die Welt katapultiert haben, natürlich unendlich dankbar, auch wenn der bescheidene Fergus seines Erachtens nach lediglich "als Fürsprecher" agiert hat. Augenrollen, Brechreiz. Alle sind glücklich, Ende.

Die Handlung ist einfach und dabei voller Widersprüche. Warum Julia überhaupt eine Beziehung mit dem unsäglichen Oscar hatte, bleibt dem Leser schleierhaft. Warum Oscar eine Beziehung mit der nervigen Julia hatte ebenfalls. Ebenso konstruiert wirkt der Groll auf Fergus, den man der Protagonistin einfach nicht abkaufen möchte. Julias Handlungen gegenüber Fergus wirken daher ständig, als habe man es mit einem pubertierenden Teenager zu tun, dessen Aktionen willkürlich erfolgen. Julia ist ständig wegen Kleinigkeiten sauer (und wäschte dann wütend Geschirr ab), die der Leser nicht nachvollziehen kann, gibt sich selbstbewusst und unabhängig und weint dann wieder, weil sie sich (grundlos oder durch ihr eigenes Verhalten evoziert) einsam oder von jemandem verletzt fühlt. Eine Protagonistin, die man lieben muss. Die zahlreichen Nebencharaktere bleiben dafür recht farblos und geben nicht viel Gelegenheit, sie zu lieben oder zu verabscheuen. Suzy ist schön, naiv, aber unglaublich nett (das war's); Fergus klug, gut aussehend und charmant; Onkel Ralph der gutmütige deftige Onkel; Wayne der dümmliche Schöpling usw. Fforde hatte offenbar kein Interesse daran, die geschaffenen Charaktere mit mehr Tiefe auszustatten, so sind alle bis auf Julia Stereotypen.

Die Sprache des Romans ist erwartungsgemäß kitschig und überzeichnet. Julia stößt häufig kleine Entsetzensschreie aus (in banalen Situationen, das versteht sich von selbst), flehentliche Schlafzimmerblicke werden mit einem Ausdruck demütiger Unterwerfung vorgebracht und Haare sind seidenweich, elastisch und

offensichtlich erst vor kurzem mit einem angenehm riechenden Shampoo gewaschen worden. Die oft übertrieben gewählten Worte machen die Handlung nicht besser, sie führen im Gegenteil dazu, dass man die Lektüre kaum noch erträgt.

Für Liebhaber von Arzt- und Alpenromantikromanen unbedingt zu empfehlen.

Nicki Adams says

Not my favourite Katie Fforde book. Predictable and a little disappointing.

Kevin says

I loved this book especially the part on the boat which is why I picked this up, but the last third of the book off the boat and the baby stuff was the funniest. First read when I stumbled on it in the library around 2000-2001, found the ebook and decided a reread was in order glad I did. Would recommend to non-romance fans as this is not a bodice ripper just an interesting fun read on starting an unusual business.

Meeeriams Fleep says

Pretty much a chick flick. I couldn't tell. Didn't read the blurb when I 'one-click' ordered it on kindle. It read like a chick flick movie, and the story didn't pace itself very well but I was certainly invested. I finished it in a day.

Why would Fergus want to marry Julia, though? I only ever saw her being rude and horrible to him. It really made no sense. There was no story building, no getting to know each other. nothing. Just lots of assumptions on Julia's part on events which happened as children - any adult human being wouldn't be so hung up on something that happened that long ago, unless it was significant in some way, and there was nothing to suggest their encounters WERE significant. The author seemed to hint that Julia was 'suppressing her feelings', but really there seemed to be no logical reason why she should do so. One would expect her to at least be civil to someone she had known as a child. It seemed like her 'pregnancy' hormones started right at the beginning. The structure was horrendously poor. I didn't see any reason why the two ought to be together, and all the 'proving' at the end was ridiculous. It read like a poorly concocted film one watches on Netflix for lack of anything better to watch.

Debbie says

Ridiculous plot, syntax in sentence structure was awkward, Why would Fergus even WANT to marry Julia????

Lolly K Dandeneau says

Nothing against the novel but it may have just been too light a read for me on the heels of the other books I've recently devoured. Or maybe my issue is that women in these type of stories always find love so easily with a neat little ending. We meet Julia Fairfax searching for a change after getting passed over for a man less qualified than her, and then she throws her snobbish fiance to the side as well. She soon lands a job as a cook working on the English Canals, on an old hotel boat and there comes the ex-fiance and his nightmare mother, guests and of course love interest from her youthful past. It was cute, for what it is... a light romantic romp.

Jaime says

Now I really want to go travel the English canals on a hotel boat.

But sheesh, what a silly woman! And yes, I know there are people like that.
