



The Men and the Girls

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Lifelong friends, now in their sixties, James Mallow, a teacher, and Hugh Hunter, a television personality, are both enjoying happy relationships with women twenty-five years their junior. James's partner of eight years, Kate Bain, appears devoted, though she will not marry him. Hugh's perfect wife, Julia, runs him, her career, their house, and their twins like clockwork. The men and the girls seem wonderfully suited. But the age difference is a time bomb ticking away at the heart of both relationships. The first signs of difficulty coincide with the appearance of an older and fiercely independent woman who unintentionally fuels the discontent already brewing in both girls. Kate's suppressed hunger for a life more natural to her age suddenly boils over; Julia, meanwhile, has to cope with her own blossoming career while watching Hugh's wither before their eyes. With warmth and wisdom, plus the acerbic sense of humor for which the English are so well known, Trollope takes a long hard look at the gaps between generations, and how very much we can learn from them.

The Men and the Girls Details

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Author : Joanna Trollope , Frank MacShane (Illustrator)

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From Reader Review The Men and the Girls for online ebook

Sharon says

This is the second Trollope novel I've read and she does not disappoint. The main thing I have loved about both the books I've read from her is that the ending is not the cliché "happy one". In a lot of women's so called "chick lit", although fun to read, you can guess the outcome before you have even begun, but not with Trollope. Her characters are so wonderfully rounded that you really find yourself caring about them and wanting to know how it all works out for them. And it won't spoil it to say – it doesn't all work out rosy for everyone involved – as it probably wouldn't in real life. But one thing that does happen for most characters is that they grow psychologically with you during the novel. She doesn't leave you in limbo at the end feeling like you have been cheated but she doesn't spoon feed you either, you learn and live with the characters themselves.

Sarah says

Utter rubbish. I didn't really care enough about the characters or the story to expand on that statement! Blatent racism also had me seething.

Sheila (in LA) says

I enjoyed the author's creation of relationships and characters that seemed so believable and real. At no point was I really sure what was going to happen, either, but all the twists and turns of the plot struck me as plausible. The final scene (and resolution of one of the main story lines) was bittersweet but I think she got it right.

Lady Prism says

♥,•*”♥,•?.. ??v? •?.

Not a single endearing character,ha!ha!But that must be the point - from the teenager to the 30's 40's 60's and (goodness) beyond' all groping through life half dazed with momentary snatches of victorious insights.

You want to dive into the scene, shake someone up, belch your opinion, guide, direct and scold them all for their selfishness, weakness, indecisiveness! And just when you think the characters have got it all together, and that good warm sniffy' story ending is about to make you sigh..well, the plot smirks at you and pounds the last page with a twisty unexpected not so happy ending.

Very much like life.

Perfect! ♥,•*”♥,•?.. ??v? •?

Rachel says

My real rating is 3.5 stars.

I enjoyed *The Men and the Girls*. It chronicles a few months in the lives of a lecturer at a school in Oxford and his friend, an aging television reporter. Their lives are turned upside down when the lecturer accidentally runs over an elderly woman.

What I enjoyed about this book was Trollope's writing, less so the characters. To me, Julia is never fully developed, although I found myself sympathizing with her the most. Trollope's description of everything is witty and clear. It saddened me to finish the book- not because the ending is heartbreaking (personally, I wanted to see more of a resolution), but because I would no longer be able to read Trollope's masterful wordplay.

Barb says

I really enjoy Joanna Trollope's books, and this one proved to be just as enjoyable as the others I have read. She takes common messy human failings and creates a story I can identify with. Her characters muddle through problems and survive not by great heroic means but just by being themselves. Not all win, not all lose, but all gain satisfaction one way or another.

Cathleen says

I liked this novel more than I thought I would. At first, it seemed a little too "of the 80s" complete with descriptions of young women with enormous glasses (and enormous shoulder pads), but the more I read, the more involved I became in the story. The novel really centers on one of the two couples: the other couple serves as a foil, but I won't say any more. Joss, a teenage girl, seemed as though she would be a minor character, but her character took a prominent role in the novel and in the characters' interactions with each other. In fact, the reason I liked the book as much as I did was because of that character. A good, summer afternoon read.

Edwina Callan says

I listened to this on cassette and it was so utterly boring that I had trouble focusing on it.

Juliet says

Devoured this. One of her better ones. Her "subject" this time is women who are abused. That topic seemed a bit forced when it pushed its way into the main storyline (no puns intended here). But that was the only off note, in my opinion. The characters were distinct, easy to visualize -- she totally nailed TV personality Hugh, for example -- and enjoyable individuals. Some of these characters we've met before, or variations on them,

but I didn't care. I feel like this time, she got them right. I wish we could have had a little more Beatrice, but all that says is I enjoyed her character, and I liked trying to figure out why everyone else liked her so much.

I am so glad Trollope keeps writing these novels, because I enjoy the heck out of reading them.

Bree T says

Both Kate Bain and Julia Hunter have found happiness with men who are significantly their senior – or so it seems. Kate, who has been with the academic James for eight years, but refused to marry him, finds herself restless and unhappy, for seemingly little reason. She lives in James' big house, working part time as a waitress and volunteering at a shelter for abused women but she sees a need for independence. To have a space that is hers, or hers and her daughter Joss'. She knows that she's making James unhappy with her retreating but she can't really think about other people right now. All she wants is a chance to be on her own and make her own way. Her daughter Joss has other ideas though. At fourteen, James' house is her home, she has lived there since she was six. She has no desire to move out of her nice bedroom into a bedsit or rooms rented from someone else. She wants to stay with James and his cantankerous uncle Leonard, who lives in the house also, no matter what her mother says.

Julia married TV presenter Hugh and gave up work to deliver two cherubic twins. At just over sixty, Hugh's career in presenting is starting to wane – he's reaching an age where most are shown the door and Julia finds that her career is starting to rise just as Hugh's goes into decline. She has always known that by marrying such an older man, she would have to go back to work when he could no longer earn, in order to educate the twins and pay the bills. Julia is happy and excited when she is offered a rather lucrative presenting contract but this is marred when she's told that they can only offer his by letting Hugh go. Although she knew that Hugh would always take such news hard, the extent to which he is affected by his enforced sort of retirement takes them both by surprise. Julia is lovely and patient and understanding and sympathetic but that only adds to Hugh's misery and his reluctance to face the fact that he no longer has work and his pretty young wife is the breadwinner for the family.

When James knocks an elderly lady off her bicycle one night coming home from work, it sets forth the chain of events that shape this novel. One moment will incite in Kate the frustration and unhappiness and urge her to leave. James and Hugh, lifelong friends, had once congratulated themselves on how lucky they were to have found love and happiness with young, beautiful, smart and happy women. Now both of their comfortable, happy lives are in upheaval.

A little while ago I bought 4 Joanna Trollope books within a couple of weeks and I thought to myself that I'd better actually read one to see what it was like before I went and acquired her whole backlist or something. I had heard lots of people complimenting *Daughters-In-Law* which I also own but I picked this one to read first.

Both Kate and Julia are in their thirties and their partner/husband are over sixty. I found the title of *The Men and the Girls* a touch patronising as lets face it, at thirty-something, they're not exactly girls. The book opens with James knocking an elderly woman off his bike due to his forgetting his glasses and the darkness of the night. Instead of a sympathetic reaction from Kate, he gets scorn and it sets in motion the feeling of restlessness in Kate, the highlighting of the age difference. Her partner is someone who knocks old ladies off their bikes because he can't see them. She's also frustrated by James' desire to make right with the old lady, who becomes a rather prominent part of the book, which merely seems as a vent for her feelings, an excuse

and something to focus on. She's not jealous in the romantic sense, as the lady is probably into her 80s, but she seems jealous irrationally, because she resents James going to see her and spending time with her, but she's not particularly interested in spending time with James herself.

Kate's daughter Joss is a typical sullen teenager, black clothes, combat boots, badly cut hair, piercings, etc. At first she seems a bit typical but throughout the book she grows and evolves and actually becomes one of my favourite characters. I fully sympathized with her desire to stay in the house she has lived in for such a large portion of her life, and not move out into rooms Kate has rented in someone else's house. She doesn't want things to change, and although her and James have had a relatively distant relationship, her desire to stay with him makes them realise just how important they are to each other. Although never morphing into sunshine and lollipops, her relationship with James and with his Uncle Leonard is well written, believable and lovely. I have stepchildren and it's a tenuous relationship, always.

I found myself less interested in Hugh and Julia's story line but I think the author herself was less interested in it also as it always seems to take a bit of a backseat to the story of James, Kate, Joss and Beatrice Bachelor, the spinster that James knocks off her bike. I liked them both well enough but they seemed less flawed, less involving than the chaos happening in the other story. Although I found it difficult to relate to both of the issues within the relationships (after all I'm not 60 and haven't lost my job, nor am I discontent with my situation) I could relate to many of the interactions between the characters.

I found this novel a pretty good introduction to a new author and I will be definitely reading the others I have soon (well soon-ish. My TBR pile is out of control!)

Rosalind says

I have really enjoyed most of the books by Joanna Trollope. Men and the Girls was the first one published in the US and I have just re-read it. It is set in Oxford, my favorite place and home of my mother and Grandparents and so I know all the areas, streets and even some of the shops mentioned.

The characters revolve around 61 year old James, who lives with his cranky old Uncle, much younger girl friend and her hard to love teenage daughter. James has a friend, Hugh, who also has a wife 25 years younger than he.

When James knocks an elderly spinster off her bike everything begins to come apart.

The book is funny, sweet and very well written. It is about the inevitability of life, love and change.

Rita says

1992

Trollope writes nice stories, but the easy formulas and platitudes of the romantic novel too often surface.

It's a mistake for me to read her books at bedtime, since they're the kind I want to keep reading to the end.

You would think that is a plus for the book, but it usually means I forget it as soon as I've closed the cover.

The 70-plus former schoolteacher character is refreshing, though rather too reminiscent of the retired knitting lady detective in an older UK author's crime stories [I'm blanking out on the name].

Then there's the crotchety 80-year-old uncle who lives with the main[?] character James.

The 14 year old daughter of James's girlfriend is another refreshing presence.

I don't know who the author intends the main character to be, perhaps Kate, the girlfriend. We follow her ups and downs the most. Yet I feel the author does not actually like Kate, and Kate does not hang together for me. She's portrayed as having great empathy for others and being very helpful, yet very impulsive about her own feelings and actions. There are vague negative references to feminism.

The author seems to like James the best, and so the reader [I at least] finds him by far the most sympathetic and interesting of all.

Beatrice [the old schoolteacher]:

"In my experience, people assume that a kind heart in someone else is a bottomless well into which it is their right, almost their duty, to dip. My mother, when she was dying, once said to me, 'How fortunate it is, Beatrice, that you have an oppty to exercise your cherishing gifts,' I went down to the kitchen after that, and simply shook with rage.'

...[My parents] were both afflicted with cancer....They preferred pain and humiliation and loss of all bodily and mental appetites to the obvious solution....Euthanasia." 76

[The author has euthanasia as a minor theme in her book]

Peter says

The chief pleasure of a Trollope novel for me is her believable dialogue and her effortless construction of characters.

If it wasn't for these two outstanding talents I don't think I could put in the effort to get through a whole novel about people I can't bring myself to like or care much about. One or two of the cast interest me (including James, "head" of the household of rather random individuals in Richmond Villa and Joss, who would be his step-daughter if her mother had ever agreed to marry him) but mostly - though beautifully drawn - I can't empathise with them.

And I love the ending.

Ginger West says

This is my second Joanna Trollope book and I'm finding a theme so far. One or more characters who are unhappy or dissatisfied with life and have some sort of mid-life crisis of sorts. I find these characters annoying. I know enough whiners in real life and don't want to be reading about more. Acknowledge it, suck it up and move on or just use some old fashioned denial and repression is what I say. That being said, I like her writing so I'm going to give one more book of hers a try but if it's the same type of plot then that will be the last Joanna Trollope I read.

Lorraine says

This is so far the only Joanna's book I actually battled with.

The book is set in the English countryside which we all know is dull, wet and dreary. The characters were at least ten; each with their own story. They ranged from mid-thirties to early eighties with Joss and Garth (the only teenagers) thrown in for good measure.

There's Julia and Hugh, married with young twin boys. Hugh is significantly older and was a charismatic TV presenter in the 70's and 80's. His career is cut short by retirement whilst Julia climbs higher in the TV world. Of course Hugh handles the whole thing badly and takes it out on Julia. I guess he felt that his inability to remain the primary provider emasculates him. Julia's succinct demeanour irks him further and he rejects her.

Kate (36 yrs) and James (61 yrs) have been together for 8 years but Kate categorically refuses to marry James. The catalyst in their relationship comes in the form of Beatrice (65 yrs). While Kate abhors all things associated with ageing, Beatrice embraces this stage in her life with vigour and excited anticipation. Kate leaves James, eventually, and gets her groove on with Mark (younger man!). Joss, Kate's 14 year old daughter, refuses to go with Kate as she regards James' house as her home and has developed a relationship with James' peculiar uncle, Leonard.

The bulk of the rising action is filtered with a slew of people who gravitate towards James and they all convene at James' house regularly.

Ultimately, due to the relationships formed during this turbulent period, James' heart heals, Hugh returns to his family and Kate, poor Kate, after Mark beats her up, reaches out to James but finds that her story in James' life has ended.

The book was too English for me and the images conjured in my mind was of 18th century England.
