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The Tosti sisters of Paris, France, have come to the small, upstate New York village of Kelton for a change of pace. But when the pair enters the lives of Alice, an unfulfilled cellist, her brother Marshall, and Fabia and Victor, another sister and brother who are as bumbling as they are overindulged, it is certain that Kelton will never again be the same unassuming place.

A Nest of Ninnies Details

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Steven says

I thought I'd read this book before but I hadn't finished...and as I'm currently reading many novels by poets: i figured this would be great two of my favorite poets...but I just get the sense that everything they did was to get the other one to smile and it just ends up being precious and cute and sort of a let down. I think I will check on see what Schuyler can do on his own.

Aileen says

This book had an amazing number of references to other literature! I loved it! It also had many little quips in French, Latin, and other languages, many of which I couldn't decipher. How funny to think this was a book about people in their late teens and early twenties because it seemed like the characters were much older with all their travelling and going out to eat and drink. A quick, entertaining read that I will probably pick up again someday and understand more of the references.

MJ Nicholls says

This brisk entertainment is good clean fun for those who like reading about affluent 1930s aesthetes having gay adventures in Paris, New York and Rome. (That's not a huge contingent of the marketplace, hence this book's unknown status. I liked it.)

John Ashbery, Pulitzer-winning poet of some 83 years is apparently on Goodreads, by the way, a fact I doubt very strongly.

Jaimie Gusman says

Just a fun, quick, witty, collaborative piece about a group of NY suburbanites who do silly things.

Meghan says

scattered and unenjoyable. would not recommend reading again.

Sara says

I flew through this book. It is an interesting mix of 1930's escapism, with a dash of the Holly-Golightly-60's, under a comedy of manners umbrella. It reads almost like a Wes Anderson story. Lots of fun!

Ashberian says

Hard to believe John Ashbery was actually involved on such an extremely poor novel . First time on my life i felt so utterly compelled to get rid of a fresh bought book .

Anybody fascinated by Ashbery's poetry should certainly avoid this one or just convince themselves it never existed and pick anything else by this genius... anything but this one .

Susan says

One of my favorite books, for reasons I can't explain. Two families living in the quiet suburbs meet, talk, dine, talk, travel, meet others. Things happen, including some happy pairings, but really nothing much happens. It's like real life, but with much better--though pointless-- conversations. By the way, the authors are noted politics John Ashbery and James Schuyler.

Christopher says

"To me," Alice said, "off-white is just another word for gray."

Divine. A camp novel combining the wryness of Ivy Compton-Burnett and the mise-en-scene of, let's say, Cheever -- a send-up of suburban doldrums. *Nest* is like a gay(er) episode of *Bewitched*, with dinner-party debacles replacing supernatural hi-jinks. (Strange gourmets.)

But the setting is mostly irrelevant. You read this novel -- cowritten by two wits, Ashbery and Schuyler -- for the hilarious tonal shifts. Any excerpt fails to convey the headlong surprise of the dialogue. Here's a try; Alice and Victor are shown raw space, to hold a possible "old-fashioned notions shop, brought up to date" by Mrs. Greeley, a realtor:

"Who was occupying this place before--a motorcycle club?"

"The owner says he's willing to repaint,' Mrs. Greeley said, "and make certain repairs. But any--er--modernization would have to be at your own expense."

"The wiring dates from the McKinley era," Alice mused.

"What are the sanitary arrangements," Victor said with unexpected authority.

"There are none," Mrs. Greeley said. "However the previous tenant worked out an amicable understanding with the optometrist who has the office above. I'm sure you could to the same."

Alice took a tape measure from her bag and began calculating various distances.

Where the proper noun and bourgeois comfort meet, *Nest* delights:

Fabia, at her end of the none-too-lengthy divan, rearranged an old Bush family afghan so that, in Thomas Beer's phrase, it 'slushed about her.'"

Cindy says

What intrigued me about this book was its title. I thought it would be filled with silly characters doing funny things, but, I got to chapter 7 and was so bored I couldn't torture myself anymore!

Scott says

Co-written with James Schuyler over a ten or fifteen year period. The novel has no plot to speak of and just gives us the ninnies in all their glory as they talk and talk.

Matt Walker says

This is what happens when two extremely smart and well-read writers decide, on a lark, to collaborate on a very silly novel. It's at least 90% dialogue, with speaking roles for what seems like about three dozen characters (a big crowd for a book under 200 pages). One gets the sense that the authors were constantly trying to one-up each other and to throw each other curveballs by which hilarious turns of plot would come into being. The ease with which they toss around cultural references, mostly "high" rather than "pop", is really astounding. Crazy, esoteric similes pop up with delightful disregard for the reader's ability to recognize their references: "No sooner had the first delectable morsels slid down their gullets than Mrs. Ernst, having finished a prolonged stint in the ladies' room, again sauntered past, much as a *merveilleuse* of the Brummell period might have sashayed along Pomander Walk, in Bath." There's a lot of French throughout the book, but the authors thankfully do not condescend to provide translations. (Assuming your reader is stupider than you, which seems to be common in literature these days, is a big pet peeve of mine.) Nothing of much importance happens in the book, but a lot of *unimportant* stuff does happen, which is what makes it so much fun. It might be the most inconsequential and therefore least pretentious novel I've ever read.
