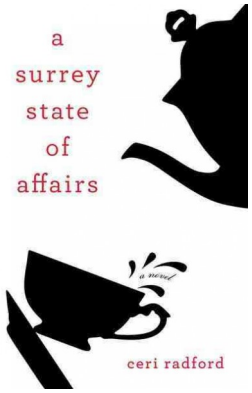
A Surrey State of Affairs



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Because they seem so personal and individual, I'm attracted to novels written in blogs, diaries, and letters. You really feel as though the writing comes directly from the blogger's heart. Ceci Radford's wonderful first novel *A Surrey State of Affairs* provides hundreds of delightful escapades while involving you with a cast of peculiar though mostly likeable characters.

Here's the plot in a nutshell: on the advice of Rupert, her IT consultant son, a middle-aged married suburbanite named Constance begins a blog where she tells of exciting and not-so-exciting events in her life. She doesn't work outside the home and has a surly eastern European housemaid named Natalie. Constance's main hobbies are throwing dinner parties (including *faux* detective ones), visiting her Mom in a nursing home, and improving her skills as a competitive church bell ringer. (Who knew Brits even competed at this?)

Pretty soon, you discover that she is also heavily involved in matchmaking: the aforementioned son with the minister's daughter and also with a bell-ringer's child. Did anyone accidentally give out her son's address to a gentle stalker?

While Constance learns the nitty gritty of posting blogs, she entertains her husband's burly Russian guest who has nasty spats with Natalie, and then takes off with Sophie. Oh Sophie! I failed to mention Constance's 18 year old surly daughter who is on her gap year counting fish in France but comes home often for non-talking visits with Mom.

Radford captures teenage angst and other family dynamics exceptionally well. Her entrance into Facebook is a hoot and before long the family travels to the Caribbean where she must bare skin. Here she enjoys revenge by emptying out a sunscreen bottle and transferring oil into it to get back at the obnoxious Russian. The family also takes a ski trip to Switzerland where Constance suffers a humiliating and unnecessary mountain top rescue. Like any good English woman, she came prepared with her thermos of tea and biscuits so she could have endured the ice-fog for much longer.

The reader soon becomes aware of strong fissures in Constance's life; i.e. her marriage and her unrealistic expectations for her children, but it's all good fun. There's a great South American travel episode also where Constance finally learns to do exactly what she wants to do rather than what's expected of her.

For books full of understated British humor about family relationships, try these two by Tessa Hadley, *The Master Bedroom* and her latest, a collection of stories called *Married Love*.

For the Love of Reading Information, Answers & Reviews A Surrey State of Affairs Fiction

Posted by Dory L. on Dec 7, 2012

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