



Finding Sylvia

Alan Shayne

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Finding Sylvia is a thoroughly modern romance, both deep and complex.

Alan Shayne's *Finding Sylvia* is an unexpected romance, both a universal reflection of searching for love and a portrait of a man enraptured by an enigmatic woman.

Judd is a former television actor, now trying to become a producer. His friend Stuart, a film executive, rents his house in Los Angeles, bringing along his girlfriend, Lady Sylvia. Sylvia is the epitome of cool, a redhead who seems to have stepped from a classic Hollywood movie, and Judd is smitten.

Just as Sylvia's relationship with Stuart is ending, and as Judd's producing career gains momentum, Sylvia disappears. Judd immediately begins his search. An old acquaintance of Sylvia's brings everything about the woman he loves into question, though, leaving Judd wondering who Sylvia really is.

Finding Sylvia is set in a glittery, wealthy world. Characters fly between Hollywood, New York, London, and Prague without batting an eye. While details of these locations are sparse, the diverse settings evoke a sense of fantasy. As a character of humble means, Judd enters this setting like Alice through the looking glass. He wants in—as a Hollywood producer; as an equal to Sylvia—but these worlds resist admitting him.

The tone of the story captures a sensibility from old detective dime novels and film noir. As Judd tells us his tale of unrequited love, his inner monologue captures the cynical tone of a Hollywood creative type, feeling both frustrated by and in awe of an often surreal and shallow entertainment industry. This snappy, world-weary tone seeps into dialogue, and conversations between Judd and Sylvia balance getting-to-know-you chit-chat with a passionate, slow burn.

This slow burn may seem to slow the plot down, but it does give a realistic tempo to the story. As it moves through Judd and Sylvia's relationship, none of the plot's points feel expected. Instead, the twists and turns of their relationship feel more biographical than fictional.

The success of the story is its rich construction of characters, especially Sylvia. Her complexity makes her compelling. Her nobility clashes with her casualness, her sensuality contrasts with her aloofness to Judd's affection, her creativity is paired with a lack of professional accomplishment, and her attractiveness is foiled by her inability to keep people in her life.

In the end, *Finding Sylvia* is less of a love story than it is a character analysis. It is a thoroughly modern romance, both deep and complex, that shows that while people may search for love in others, in the end, true love is found within.

KATERIE PRIOR (October 16, 2017)

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