



Illegal Liaisons

Grazyna Plebanek

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This novel exposes the battle between moral restraint and emotional expression.

Overshadowed by a powerful wife, a man puts his writing career on hold, relocates to Brussels at her request, and then engages in a passionate affair with another woman to satisfy his need for recognition. Jonathan is intelligent and compelling, yet his marriage to Megi does not meet his expectations. This is his story—a series of erotic interludes with free-spirited Andrea.

With a few unusual twists on a commonplace infidelity plot, Grazyna Plebanek presents a man torn between his responsibilities and his professional life, which has been run off the road in a stereotypical, sideswiping marital maneuver. Teaching students had not been his aspiration, at least not initially, yet he has settled for less than his dream to please his wife.

His sexual behavior may be perceived as a manifestation of discontent, opposed to the motivation itself, despite the emphasis on sex throughout this book. “He eagerly awaited their trysts, like a believer awaiting Holy Communion, equally unsure whether he was worthy.”

Touted as erotica at its best, the underlying forbidden nature of Jonathan’s relationship with Andrea has a decidedly “naughty boy” ring, rather than coming across as deep, soulful lovemaking. “He took her by the hand and led her to the nearest church. She entered the dark vestibule first; he followed, unable to chase away the thought of whether she had anything else on beneath her coat apart from underwear.”

In time, the affection for his lover turns into fixation, like a full-scale addiction to a drug. He panics when she does not respond to communications and obsesses over insignificant details. Few would classify clandestine gratification as necessary for sustaining life, yet in the end, Jonathan cannot function without the “fix” of another encounter. “Bad dreams and strange thoughts tormented him. He couldn’t imagine daily life without her, even a brief parting.”

Fascinating, yet somewhat disturbing, the plot exposes what can happen when the tables are turned in an ego-driven marriage, and a husband plays a secondary role next to a successful wife. Admirable command of language, as well as perceptive understanding of human character, sets this author’s work apart from run-of-the-mill erotic fiction. Strong description, creating a complete sensory experience, brings to vivid life each intimate encounter. The aftereffects, which linger long after the sex is over, permeate the scenes that follow.

A native of Poland, Grazyna Plebanek lives in Brussels, Belgium, which has enhanced the fine-tuned setting of her third novel, *Illegal Liaisons*.

This book espouses a complicated mixture of conservative restraints and liberal ideals at war within a protagonist who cannot balance the definition of Christian matrimony with genuine love. Old World meets New World in a battle for individual expression.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (Fall 2013)

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