



## Preschooled

*Anna Lefler*

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Behind the toddler-proof gate of Santa Monica's exclusive Garden of Happiness, it's the grown-ups who are getting schooled.

When new preschool parent Justine discovers that the man who broke her heart back in grad school is a dad in her daughter's class, she tells herself she's immune to the superficial charms of the ex she calls "the crapwizard." But when his presence opens a time tunnel of potent memories from her life before motherhood, she must find a way to defuse her old attraction to him before it undermines her marriage.

Then there's Ruben, rookie stay-at-home dad and standup comic who quits his day job to pursue his TV-writing dream on his wife's condition that he take her place among the "power mommies" on the school committees.

And ruling the sand box with an iron fist is Margaret, whose ongoing divorce from her dentist-turned-New Age-surfer husband forces her to rely on her dubious people skills in order to keep the school that has become the cornerstone of her identity.

When the new school year kicks off with a flight-risk rabbit named Ozone, a school secretary in desperate need of a social filter, and some double-barreled committee recruiting tactics, it's not all juice and cookies for Justine, Ruben, and Margaret as they struggle to play nice.

## Preschooled Details

Date : Published October 1st 2015 by Full Fathom Five Digital

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Author : Anna Lefler

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## From Reader Review Preschooled for online ebook

### Shelleystrae at Book'd Out says

Preschooled is a funny, light and sardonic debut novel from Anna Lefler.

Thrilled when her daughter gains a place at the exclusive Garden of Happiness preschool in Santa Monica, Justine is eager to impress the center's demanding owner, Margaret, but is thrown when she runs into the man who once shattered her heart.

Margaret expects nothing less than slavish obedience from the parents who pay handsomely for privilege of a preschool education at The Garden of Happiness. Margaret is always in control, but when her soon-to-be-ex-husband betrays her by threatening to take away everything she has built, her tantrum will rival any recalcitrant toddler's.

Ruben's wife has gone back to work so he can work on developing a television script while looking after their twins, but he's struggling until he finds inspiration among the committee mothers of the Garden of Happiness.

As the narrative alternates between Lefler's three main protagonists it gently mocks the absurdities of preschool admission competition and privileged pretension, while also lightheartedly addressing more universal issues such as parenting, marriage strife and work/life balance.

Preschooled is a quick and entertaining read that doesn't take itself too seriously, and won't expect you to either.

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### Ilana says

Title: Preschooled

Author: Anna Lefler

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### Overview

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Then there's Ruben, rookie stay-at-home dad and standup comic who quits his day job to pursue his TV-

writing dream on his wife's condition that he take her place among the "power mommies" on the school committees.

And ruling the sand box with an iron fist is Margaret, whose ongoing divorce from her dentist-turned-New Age-surfer husband forces her to rely on her dubious people skills in order to keep the school that has become the cornerstone of her identity.

When the new school year kicks off with a flight-risk rabbit named Ozone, a school secretary in desperate need of a social filter, and some double-barreled committee recruiting tactics, it's not all juice and cookies for Justine, Ruben, and Margaret as they struggle to play nice.

### My Thoughts

First off i should thank the kind folks at Netgalley for getting me a copy of this book to read. Granted it took me far longer to finish it than i expected (not for the books reasons i have to say) but at least i finally found some time to get through it. I'll thank the LIRR for that since commuting definitely gives me an hour each way to read.

So in this story, we get a nice dose of chick lit - it's a story that's based on a rotation of characters' chapters, showing us how everything is intertwined. You don't ever know who's really the focal point here, if it's Margaret, the owner of Garden of Happiness, Justine, a new mom to the school who's going through her own stuff at home, or if it's Reuben, a dad of twins at the same school who's trying to deal with his stuff. Note that they all have stuff going on.

Where this story takes us is a path to see how resilient you are when you're forced into situations that you didn't expect. Margaret is going through a divorce which may result in her having to sell her school. Along that same path, her daughter's a freshman in college and is caught in the middle of said divorce.

Then there's Justine, her daughter is new to the school and is forcing her to really become one of the mom set. If that weren't bad enough, the family assigned to show her the ropes is none other than the guy who broke her heart in grad school. so things of course get more complicated. and if that still weren't enough, she thinks that her husband is having an affair with the office trollup.

Then there's the final story line of Reuben - he's a dad of twins, and a comedian who's lost his mojo. His wife works in a job that she hates, meaning that he has to make something work in the comedy realm, and participate in school stuff and well, at least there's a silver lining there for him. He's found his groove a bit.

Anyhow, the course of this story shows us that not everyone is perfect - assuming the impression that you got of them in life was perfect. Everyone's got their stuff going on, and i think that there's a lot of growth that can be done and is done. where we net out with the story and the journeys of all these folks is a nice place and i think that you see that all is resolved, even if there are several surprises.

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### Jenn says

Such a fun light book. A guilty pleasure reality tv type book!

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## Lorraine Montgomery says

All is not rosy at the Garden of Happiness preschool. The chapter titles are all one of three characters: Margaret, who owns and runs the most prestigious preschool on the Westside of Santa Monica, CA, Justine, a mom who found all of the preschools she previewed a bit annoying but thought her daughter, Emma, was the most comfortable at the GoH, and Ruben, a stay-at-home dad of twins whose wife is working so that he can work on his comedy script and possibly land a job in television.

All of the other characters revolve around these three: Margaret, whose suddenly earth-child husband has walked out on her so he decides, since her school is their only major asset, that he's entitled to a chunk of its value; Justine, who very quickly becomes ensnared in all of the extra curricular activities she's dragged into so that her daughter can eventually get into the kindergarten of her choice and discovers the first evening that not only is her former lover there with his wife and children, but they are "paired" with Justine and her husband, Greg, and are "required" to socialize with them in order to learn the ropes; and finally, Ruben, whose wife encourages him to become busier in order to get more done on his script, so he winds up on several committees being Mr. Gracious in order to be successful at preschool.

Spinoffs include Greg being "vamped" by a lawyer "femme fatale" at work and doesn't recognize it, while Justine's best friend forever, Ruthie, has a secret she's been hiding from her for almost a decade and it threatens to pull them apart; Ruben's attempt to network with another husband via his GoH committee backfires in a way that benefits him anyway; and, Margaret's husband, Eddie, is using their daughter to pressure her into selling her school since that's the only way she can see to come up with the money required to buy Eddie out.

One of the funniest characters in the book, is Margaret's executive assistant, Trey, who seems to be the one person who knows her well enough to give her sarcastic backtalk which actually picks her up. Well, usually. His ability to

continue to stare at her with one eyebrow cocked, unconcerned with generally accepted rules of conduct between employees and employers, until she caved. . . was one in an array of infuriating qualities that, while frustrating Margaret on an almost hourly basis, also made him indispensable as the school secretary. No one — not even Margaret — defanged an imperious Westside mom with the ruthless efficiency of a gay man who lacked a social censor.

This novel is incredibly witty, rife with characters most of us will have met at one time or another, in one field or another, to one degree or another, as they are not limited to the preschool setting, it's just that they tend to shine there. I'm not sure if Lefler coined the term "wasband" — the man who was your husband — but I'd never heard it before and I love it. Trey describes Margaret's daughter's roommate as "an angry woman with the Danny Partridge haircut", while Leticia is described by Trey as a "mini-Margaret". His advice to Margaret is to

show a smidge of that vulnerability we both know you'd rather get a poodle perm than own up to. Give [Eddy] the impression that when he goes to his car, he won't find you crouched in the backseat waiting to filet him with a Garden Weasel.

Judging from what Lefler describes on her website as her own "transformative process that started in a mini-mall coffee shop with a pencil, a spiral notebook, and the first of several thousand zucchini-walnut muffins", her Ruben character is somewhat based on herself. Her writing is clear and precise, delivering zingers with aplomb, and maintaining a high level of suspense in what is not really a suspense novel. This was fabulously entertaining.

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### **Monica Cullip says**

Preschool

This story was gifted to me in exchange for an honest review by NetGalley.

What a change of pace. My usual go-to read reading style is definitely romance but when asked to review this one I decided to give it a go. What a lovely story. This author made me see inside all three characters. They all revolve around the Garden Of Happiness preschool.

Justine, a stay at home mom has just managed to get her daughter Emma accepted at the school. Here she runs into her old college boyfriend whose children also attend the school. With Justine perceiving problems in her marriage that may or may not be there she struggles with the way things ended with the ex.

Ruben is a stay-at-home dad raising twins who is supposed to be writing his comedy routine. He is having some what of a mental block and is unable to write anything. This does not bode well with his wife who has returned to work so that he can write.

Lastly there is Margaret the owner of the preschool. She runs the centre with an iron fist, but unfortunately her marriage is in shambles and creating much havoc. Thankfully she has her flamboyant personal assistant to help her along.

The story bounces back and forth for POV through each character. Their thoughts and feelings are so very true to life. I found myself easily able to identify with each of them. They made me laugh and cry and curse with them. I truly enjoyed this book and would recommend to anyone that just wants to sit back and relax and have a good read. That is what this is, A good solid read. I would rate a 4/5.

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### **Zee Monodee says**

Funny, warm, and actually engaging! If you love pre-school 'politics', then this is one book you do not want to miss

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### **Laura.125Pages says**

Original review at [www.125pages.com](http://www.125pages.com)

I received this book for free from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review.

### 3.5 Stars

Preschooled reminded me of *Mommy Tracked* by Whitney Gaskell and the spate of similar books that came out in 2006-2008. Sanctimommies abound and the main character/s are the only sane ones around, usually with a clueless/unsupportive spouse. I actually like books like this; yes they are formulaic but they are also fun. The three main characters all revolved around a prestigious preschool in swanky Beverly Hills where the children have ridiculous names and the tuition is on par with an Ivy League university. This one was slightly off formula as it also includes the beleaguered but stoic owner Margaret as one of the main characters. It was nice to have a mature voice included. I also particularly enjoyed the stay at home dad Reuben and his bewildered observations on the posh mommy set. So *Preschooled* is not award winning literature, but it was well written, engaging and just plain cute.

Favorite lines from Chapter 11 – “What was the big deal about preschool, anyway? Some of these parents acted like their child’s entire future hinged on their performance at circle-rug song time. You think that weak clapping is going to get you into an Ivy League school? Now, try it again from where the wheels on the bus are going ’round and ’round, and this time I want to hear you sell it!”

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### Florinda says

Justine and Greg Underwood have succeeded in getting their daughter Emma into Margaret Askew’s prestigious Santa Monica preschool, Garden of Happiness, and they’re about to find out what an education awaits them. Well, Justine is, at any rate; attorney Greg is too busy with a demanding caseload (and an overly-attentive associate) to get very involved, but he can’t avoid seeing how Justine has been sucked into the school’s power-mom vortex as chair of its annual fundraising auction. He doesn’t see just how much pressure Justine’s under from Margaret, though. Margaret’s made it clear that the stakes for the auction are high, but she hasn’t told anyone that if it doesn’t meet its goals, she could lose the school in a divorce settlement. And Justine doesn’t want Greg to see how dealing with one of the other preschool parents, who happens to have been her grad-school boyfriend, is affecting her.

Justine’s narrative runs parallel with that of Ruben, who has surprised everyone including himself by becoming Garden of Happiness’ only “power dad.” When he and his wife traded roles—she went back to a full-time job, he stayed home to take care of their twins and work on his stand-up comedy and writing—he reluctantly agreed to take on her school-parent tasks, but never expected to become so absorbed by them that they might change his creative direction.

This is Anna Lefler’s first published novel, but she has been a standup comic and comedy writer, and she draws on those experiences in writing Ruben. She’s also a Berkeley grad who left a public-relations career for marriage and full-time motherhood, so she shares some of Justine’s background as well. And I don’t doubt she has plenty of experience with the power moms of Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. That said, there’s no indication that **Preschooled** is autobiographical; however, it is clearly informed by real life, and in the best possible way. The characters and situations feel recognizable, if exaggerated for comic effect, and that makes the comedy feel honest and earned.

Originally reviewed at The 3 R's Blog: <http://www.3rsblog.com/2015/10/book-t...>

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### **Jenna says**

I got an advance copy of this book and literally COULD. NOT. PUT. IT. DOWN. I love a funny book that's also smart, and PRESCHOoled did not disappoint. Lefler isn't just hilarious; she's a gifted story-teller as well. Her characters are real, relatable and perfectly flawed, and her writing style makes you feel as if you're having a chat with your coolest, most intuitive girlfriend. Highly recommend!

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### **Grace {Rebel Mommy Book Blog} says**

#### **Review**

I totally grabbed this puppy up as soon as I saw the title. then I read the blurb. I was sold.

The book follows three characters who all have some connection to the Garden of Happiness preschool. Margaret who owns the school. Rueben a preschool dad whose kids are returning to the school. Finally, Justine the first time Garden of Happiness parent. These characters and their stories do intersect a bit, but for the most part, they are kind of separate. I'll go through all three characters starting wth my least favorite.

#### **"All's fair in love, war, and preschool committees."**

#### **Margaret**

Ugh. Margaret. What a beast of a woman. She owns the Garden of Happiness preschool and takes her job very seriously. She thinks she is like a child as well as a parent whisperer. I think she was good with the kids in one sense but she took herself a bit too seriously. She was going through a divorce, which honestly wasn't surprising based one her personality. Her husband wasn't great either, though. It was kind of hard ot care what happened to her. What did save Margaret's part was her assistant Trey. COMIC RELIEF. He was constantly lightening the mood and making me crack up. More Trey please!

#### **Justine**

I thought she would be my favorite but she made some questionable decisions I couldn't get behind. Still, there were a lot of things I did relate to. She left her career to be a stay at home mom while her husband continued his successful legal career. She was super excited to get her daughter into the exclusive Garden of Happiness. I really don't understand the craziness over getting into the right preschool but I guess in certain places that exists. Either way Justine finds out her ex, who she clearly has unresolved feelings for, is a father at the school. Do to circumstances they are constantly thrown together. Shenanigans ensue. Also, Justine gets roped into playing a large part in the fundraising committee and struggles to balance life with the committee and dealing with Margaret. I did like Justine. She was funny. I think being at home and not having a job left her a bit insecure though about her husband. While the committee was a pain I think it gave her a place to focus her energies. Anytime there are marriage issues of the super believable kind I get uncomfortable. I still like reading about them but it makes me sad.

#### **Rueben**

I wish there was more Rueben. What a gem. I am not sure I could find something I didn't like about him. Or his wife for that matter. He became a stay at home dad so he could work on a script and his career as a comic. When things stall his wife tells him he also needs to be part of some committee at the school to help fill his time so he wouldn't be so focused on his current writer's block. I loved Rueben with all the preschool

moms. He was hysterical and really started to become one of the gang. I enjoyed his take on the preschool and the moms and how at first I think he kind of mocked them a bit but then he really embraced them as his people. I loved his story arc.

Overall I enjoyed the book quite a bit. I loved the funny bits and all the little parental things I could relate to. I think for the most part they all ended up in a good spot and it was pretty believable, especially with Justine. I would have loved for there to have been more connections and interactions between the three characters though. Still I would recommend this especially to anyone with kids. This review was originally posted on Rebel Mommy Book Blog

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### **Kate Puleo Unger says**

I enjoyed this book, but it really felt more like three parallel stories instead of one cohesive novel. The book follows the lives of three characters, all connected to the Garden of Happiness preschool. Margaret, the owner, is dealing with a messy divorce and trying to save her school from being sold, so her soon-to-be ex-husband can get his half of that asset. Justine, a new preschool mom, gets roped into being the chair of the school auction. She's also dealing with her insecurities when an old boyfriend pops up and when a woman from the office starts making moves on her husband. Finally, Ruben is a stay-at-home dad rocking his preschool committee assignment and working on his sitcom script and stand-up comedy on the side.

I loved Ruben! He and his wife, Deandra, had such a positive and healthy relationship. I also loved his humor and his ability to work the moms. He was a great friend to everyone and a wonderful father. I was rooting for him throughout the book.

I identified a lot with Margaret. She is a high powered business woman who can be more than a little unfeeling with other people. Her world is crumbling, and she doesn't know how to ask for help. She's afraid of losing face with her preschool parents, but she's pissing everyone off left and right, including her daughter. Her story was a little tough to read because the divorce was so ugly.

I could not stand Justine. It was painful to read her chapters. I wanted to stop her from making bad choices and ruining her marriage with her jealousy.

Overall, I wish the three stories had overlapped more. The pacing was a bit too slow for my taste, and some of the dialog was kind of awkward. I enjoyed the antics of preschool, although suburban Wisconsin is much different than Southern California.

<http://www.momsradius.com/2015/11/book-review-garden-of-happiness/>

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### **Camille Hoffman says**

## **Donna Cavanagh says**

I loved this book. I have been a fan of Ms. Lefler for a long time. Her writing is crisp, funny and down to earth. Prechooled will make you laugh out loud and feel the main character Justine's maternal angst. If you thought college admissions down the road were going to be tough, get ready for the cutthroat world of toddler education. This book is filled with humor, warmth and you will root for Justine and a cast of characters, who learned the hard way that the social challenges of preschool are sometimes most difficult for the parents and not the child. I so enjoyed Preschooled and it maintains and goes beyond the high bar Ms. Lefler set with her previous work, *The Chicktionary: From A-Line to Z-Snap, The Words Every Woman Should Know*. I would recommend this novel to anyone.

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## **Karen Tomsovic says**

It can be so hard to find a book that makes you laugh out loud, especially one with a satirical story. Happily, "Preschooled" fills that bill, in a romance-y, chick lit, women's fic kind of way.

Anna Lefler does a bang-up job skewering moneyed L.A. hipsters and the Brentwood designer preschool around which the story is centered.

Of the three protagonists, the character of Margaret, the founder of Garden of Happiness, who risks losing the preschool in an impending divorce, was my favorite. The author really nailed her type: super-competent high achiever with high standards who suffers no fools but can't understand why people don't like her.

Reuben, the house husband and aspiring comedian, appropriately gets the best laughs.

Main protagonist Justine, the newest mother at the preschool, struck me as rather generic. But then again, I don't have kids and am probably not the target reader here. Harried moms may identify with her more.

Still, this a well-paced read that I wished would go on and on. Be prepared for some surprises and twists on the way to the tidy ending, especially in Justine's story.

And you will laugh out loud while reading "Preschooled." Without spoiling any jokes, let me just say this one punch line: "Siddartha Zuckerman." Hilarious.

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## **Sarah says**

So. Much. Fun. Take one snooty Santa Monica pre-school, a fleet of wealthy hipster parents, and add that L.A. air and you have the makings of a guilty pleasure. The novel seamlessly moves back and forth between three characters affiliated with the school; the mother of a two-year-old girl just entering the foray, a Mr. Mom father of twins attempting to make it in the television sitcom business, and the rigid director smack in the middle of a contentious divorce. I am not sure if readers in other parts of the world would enjoy this quite as much as I did but, as a transplant to the southern California scene, I liked the mockery of some of the people I have encountered around these parts.

