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## Gentlemen Formerly Dressed

by Sulari Gentill

Price: \$15.95 ()

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Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

**From the Publisher:** *There's an Evelyn Waugh-meets-Agatha Christie feel about this series.* Handsome, wry, and witty despite his impeccable manners, and the dedicated black sheep of his conservative, wealthy Australian family, Rowland Sinclair prefers to leave managing the immense family fortune and politics to his elder brother, Wil, while pursuing a life as a gentleman artist. A life in company of boho housemates Clyde, a fellow painter; Milton, a plagiarising poet; and Edna, the beautiful, emancipated sculptress who is both his muse and the (unacknowledged) love of his life. Having barely escaped 1933 Germany while reluctantly pursuing an off-the-books mission in Munich, the usually stoic Rowly remains horrified and deeply troubled by the changes that have come about under the Nazi government. The country which he knew in his early twenties as the centre of modern art and culture, is now, under Hitler, oppressed and sanitised. Tortured by the SA for the degeneracy of his own paintings, he bears both physical and emotional scars. For the first time he is moved to take a stance politically, to try and sway the political thought of the time. A friend of the Left and son of the Right, Rowland doesn't really know what he is doing, or what should be done, but he is consumed with a notion that something should be done. Plus he needs to recuperate. And so Rowly and his friends make for England rather than returning to Sydney. In London, in the superlative luxury of Claridge's, they feel safe. Then Viscount Pierrepont is discovered in his club, impaled by a sword. Pierrepont is sporting a frilly negligée and makeup - so, a sex crime? Too embarrassing. And too bizarre a death for this aging gentleman, and him newly wed. His murder, and the suspicion falling on his young niece, quickly plunge the Australians into a queer world of British aristocracy, Fascist Blackshirts, illicit love, scandal, and spies ranging from London and its suburbs to Bletchley Park and Oxford, and inevitably drawing in Wil Sinclair as well as players like H.G. Wells and Winston Churchill. It's a world where gentlemen are not always what they are dressed up to be.

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### About The Author

#### Sulari Gentill

After setting out to study astrophysics, graduating in law and then abandoning her legal career to write books, Sulari now grows French black truffles on her farm in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains of NSW. Sulari is author of The Rowland Sinclair Mystery series, historical crime fiction novels (eight in total) set in the 1930s. Sulari's *A Decline in Prophets* (the second book in the series) was the winner of the Davitt Award for Best Adult Crime Fiction 2012. She was also shortlisted for Best First Book (*A Few Right Thinking Men*) for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize 2011. Paving the New Road was shortlisted for another Davitt in 2013.

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## What We Say

This light mystery is right up my alley, from the time period (between the wars) to the setting of London to the slightly bohemian Aussies slumming it in among British aristocrats when they stumble upon a murder. Even the cover appeals. "Gentlemen Formerly Dressed" is the fifth in a series starring Rowland Sinclair. Rowland's brother is in politics and generally disapproving of his little brother's adventures. No surprise: our amateur sleuth is swimming in money, quite a talented artist and his friends are Communists and sculptors and jolly good fun. They apparently dash about the globe getting into trouble. This book begins with them arriving in London after Rowland was attacked, had his arm broken and was nearly killed by Nazis. He's determined to make someone in the British government listen to his warnings about this Hitler fellow, but no one cares what an artist and an Aussie thinks about anything. To top off his failure to raise an alarm, one meeting begins with Rowland stumbling upon the body of a blue-blooded nobleman wearing a woman's nightie and impaled with a sword. It's all very scandalous and hush hush, but since an innocent young woman may be convicted of the crime just to keep things tidy, Rowland and his friends spring into action. Soon they're tussling with British fascists, getting private tours of Madame Tussaud's, politely turning down same-sex proposals from royalty and sharing opinions with everyone from Evelyn Waugh (a bore) to H.G. Wells (quite a jolly chap) to Salvation Army volunteers (boring, but nice). All of this SHOULD be delightful. But it isn't. The details feel forced (like the author's pointed explanations of what this or that title means), the characters aren't nearly as amusing as they want to be (the biggest running gag involves the quoting of poetry) and since I didn't read books 1 through 4 I have no clue as to why our hero's interest in his marvelous friend Edna (who clearly fancies him) should be such a non-starter. (They love each other but it's not meant to be. For some reason.) And the mystery is banal, with the usual red herrings and an uninteresting reveal of the real villain(s). I shan't make their acquaintance again any time soon. -- Michael Giltz

## What Others Say

"The murder case...is just an entrée into what Gentill does so well: serve up intensely realized period details and reminders of the intersections of crime, art, society, and politics." (Connie Fletcher Booklist) "The pleasure of this novel lies...in observing Rowland at dinner with Evelyn Waugh, trading insights with H.G. Wells, and setting Winston Churchill straight on the evils of nationalism. Fans of upper-class sleuths will be in their element." (Publishers Weekly) "The combination of famous historical figures, detailed descriptions of a troubling time, and plenty of action makes for a tale as rousing as it is relevant." (Kirkus Reviews review of Paving the New Road) "This book has it all: intrigue among the British aristocracy, the Nazi threat and a dashing Australian hero. I didn't want it to end!" (Rhys Bowen, author of the New York Times bestselling Royal Spyness and Molly Murphy mysteries, and the #1 Kindle bestseller, In Farleigh Field) "Rowland's determined attempts to open British eyes to the gathering storm combine mystery, rousing adventure, and chance meetings with eminent figures from Churchill to Evelyn Waugh." (Kirkus Reviews)

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