Better Reading Q&A – After the Party

1. *After the Party* is a heart-warming story about marriage, parenting, and family. Can you tell us a bit more about the novel?

With pleasure! *After the Party* begins with a fifth birthday party which goes terribly, horribly badly. mum, Lisa Wheeldon, wakes late, which means nothing's quite ready by the time 32 children land on her doorstep. A ruined cake, a trashed backyard, and a traumatic pinata experience later, the party ends and the children are despatched home, all except for one child – Ellie – who Lisa discovers hiding in the backyard. At first, she reasons that Ellie's mother is just running late, but as the minutes tick by, it becomes quite clear that she has no intention of returning at all.

2. What inspired the idea behind the story?

Having hosted many parties for my three daughters, I noticed this weird phenomenon whereby parents accompany their child to a party up until about the age of four, but then they all disappear from about the fifth birthday. They just drop and run! (Confession: I've done it myself. That child-free two hours is precious!). But I started to think about how a desperate mum might exploit the chaos and relative anonymity of a child's party. In a thematic sense, I also wanted to explore what it really means to be a 'good' mum.

3. *After the Party* is your debut novel – can you tell us a bit about your writing journey, and how you came to publish your first novel?

After the Party is one of those magical-unicorn manuscripts that got picked up off the delightfully named 'slush pile' by the lovely people at Harlequin Australia. This rarely happens and I'm still shaking my head in disbelief that it happened to me. I'd had many short stories published previously, and had written a couple of manuscripts but *After the Party* was the first full-length manuscript that really felt like 'me'. It has a healthy dose of humour, which probably explains why it was such fun to write.

4. The novel heavily explores themes of motherhood – as a mother yourself, how much of your own personal experience did you inject into the novel?

A lot! I've had pool parties that got rained out, and cakes that resembled a pair of lopsided breasts (in my defence, it did look a *little* like an 8). Children's parties constantly teeter on the edge of disaster and, in a way, are a metaphor for that high-wire act of parenting. I often say that motherhood made me a writer, but not because the kids 'complete' me. If anything, it's the opposite. Being home alone with a crying baby can feel like the loneliest place in the world. Writing helped me through. It was something just for me.

5. What was your favourite book of 2018, and which book are you most looking forward to in 2019?

Oh, this is tough – it's like trying to choose a favourite child (hint: the third one. Don't tell anyone!) but in the interests of not sitting on the fence, I'll nominate 'The Lost Man' by Jane Harper. She has such an incredible affinity with the Australian outback and I love the way in which she writes character.

In 2019, I'm looking forward to new releases by all my favourite Australian female authors – Sally Hepworth (already read and loved *The Mother in Law*), Natasha Lester, Rachael Johns, Wendy

James, Josephine Moon, Tess Woods, Dervla McTiernan… and look, I could go on and on, but look at that list! We're in a golden age of Australian women writers and I'm so chuffed to be part of it.