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Laying down the law forever

BY GINA SALAMONE

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THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE by Julie Buxbaum, Dial, \$25

Julie Buxbaum quit her career in law two years ago because she was bored with it. Now, she's anxiously awaiting the publication of her first novel, "The Opposite of Love" (Dial, \$25).

"The Opposite of Love" is hot. Not sex-scene hot, but word-of-mouth hot.

According to her high-profile editor at Dial Press, Susan Kamil, the house won the book in a highly contested auction.

"Buxbaum has powerful storytelling skills, and is married to an extraordinary literary sensibility," says Kamil. "This kind of talent doesn't come along that often. There's been a buzz since the auction."

Kamil's confident that the novel (out Jan. 29) will do well. "This is a very healthy first printing, certainly enough to establish the book early in its publishing life as a best seller."

The author says the book "came out of absolutely nowhere. My last day was on a Friday, and on Monday I sat down and started writing. Before writing this book, I hadn't published any short stories or anything."

Buxbaum had been working at a large law firm in New York before transferring to its Los Angeles office. She then left for a smaller company, hoping to find comfort in the cozier environment, but soon realized the field just wasn't for her.

Like the 30-year-old Buxbaum once was, Emily Haxby - the novel's protagonist - is a successful Manhattan attorney struggling to find satisfaction in her work. They're around the same age, and lost their moms at the age of 14. But Buxbaum is quick to point out the similarities end there.

"It's all fiction," she stresses. "I know everyone is going to assume I'm the main character and I have to come to terms with that. And we do have a lot in common. When I was creating her, I wanted to do a thought experiment - sort of a 'Who would I be if I didn't have the support of my family?'"

Emily's father never addressed the death of her mom, leaving her numb and feeling alone.

"I have an amazing dad who is nothing like the father in the book, and a phenomenal brother," Buxbaum says. "For Emily, when she loses her mother, it's effectively an orphaning. Emily in some ways is the exact opposite of me. It's sort of weird when you're writing a character whose instincts are completely different from your own."

Emily dumps her doting boyfriend just as he hints at a marriage proposal. She only knows that it doesn't feel right.

But she still loves him, and isn't pleased when she spots him flirting with a co-worker she loathes. At the same time, Emily's asked to help defend a ruthless chemical company spreading cancer.

When she heads to Arkansas to work on the case with her married boss, she discovers he has booked them both in the same hotel room with just one bed. And he only goes further out of line from there.



The Opposite of Love'

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The only company Emily finds solace in is that of her seventysomething doorman, who's the last person she sees every night when she returns to her Greenwich Village apartment.

"I think Emily turning to her doorman for comfort is so quintessential New York," says Buxbaum. "New York is almost a character in the book. I wanted to capture the illusion of anonymousness that pervades life in New York, which matches Emily's mood through much of the book - her feeling of numbness, of wanting to disappear. And I felt New York was conducive to showing that."

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