



Bygones

Lisa K. Nielsen

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Fans of contemporary romance mixed with a mystery subplot will be happily sated.

Bygones, by Lisa K. Nielsen, entices with sympathetic characters and a series of mysterious break-ins. Suspense and romance are braided together through the novel, doubling the compelling tension. Characters must face their own prejudices—class issues and the fear of stagnation in their hometown.

Hunky contractor Joe Manning becomes reacquainted with his high-school crush, Dr. Alexandra “Lexi” Hadley, at her father’s funeral. At the same time, her father’s home is broken into, robbed of nothing save the dead man’s laptop. So begins a novel full of sexy banter and menacing intrigue.

Lexi works as a researcher at the University of Chicago with her older, successful boyfriend. Her life seems set until her father’s death, and his bequest of half a practice and a childhood home call her back. Manning, too, made his way home to work as a contractor in his hometown, where he still has dinner with his parents on Sundays and plays basketball with high-school buddies. His entrenched position makes Lexi nervous, but she can’t deny the attraction.

Nielsen uses the braided narrative to keep the romance moving and the mystery compelling. Her characters are likable and believable, whether they are swapping classic novels or bonding over take-out. The novel is well paced, moving quickly into the dual conflict of romance and suspense. Though the mystery is not as well realized as the romance, it nevertheless gives the couple a conflict over which to become closer. The third-person point of view allows insight into the thoughts of both characters, creating a dramatic tension wherein the audience feels the attraction growing between them. With a small ensemble of supporting characters, ranging from a relentlessly chipper real estate agent to a sketchy colleague, Nielsen creates a small-town vibe where the ghosts of high school still haunt, gossip, and interfere.

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CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (Summer 2016)

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