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Dogs

Abigail DeWitt
Lorimer Press (November 2010)
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Molly Moore, slight and unobtrusive, is silent but watchful. The youngest in a family of five children, she is the peacemaker and confidante, the keeper of secrets and the interpreter of desires. From her silent post, Molly is witness to both the dark and the light—the strangeness of her mother, the poisonous anger of her sister, the frail existence of her brother, and most of all, the stoic and withdrawn nature of her father, a revered judge in Austin, Texas.

When Molly learns that her father has survived a car accident but killed the daughter of a childhood friend, she does not rush in solidarity to her father's side. Deep down, she knows her father is capable of dark deeds and in an effort to understand her feelings, she begins a process of intense personal study, ruminating over her childhood and the misdeeds of her youth. Bit by bit, she dissects the bonds that connect her to her father.

With Molly, the reader journeys through a deeply moving period of self-discovery. The dirty bits of growing up, so often brushed into corners and ignored, are brought unflinchingly to the surface. DeWitt's ability to draw meaning from fleeting moments is a major strength of this book. For instance, DeWitt returns over and over to the image of Molly's sister Babette popping birth control pills—pink tablets breaking through thin slips of foil—in an attempt to understand the politics of control and flagrant disobedience. This intense focus on single moments and images is characteristic of DeWitt's original style.

In captivating detail, DeWitt aptly captures the hungry desperation of teenagers nudging their way through the confusion of junior-high. Young Molly's struggle to fit into this new and dangerous world, with its mish-mash of confusing halls, lockers, indifferent teachers, and anonymous students, comes brilliantly to life. The tension-wrought prose glistens with true-to-life characters who possess raw, unfeigned emotion: the brazen confidence of young girls experimenting with newfound sexuality, the pulsing appetites of tentative teenage boys, and insistent, painfully familiar feelings of self-doubt. Dewitt's unsettling and realistic depiction makes Molly's experience both familiar and relatable.

At its heart, this is a family saga that delves into the dark interiors of human interaction. Though intensely depressing, it is the kind of novel that deepens one's understanding of love and family. Truly illuminating, *Dogs* will appeal to readers looking for a raw and gritty read.
SHOILEE KHAN (October 16, 2010)

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