

★ **Girl Town**

Carolyn Nowak

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Carolyn Nowak's *Girl Town* is an intriguing, masterful celebration of girls and girlhood that honors young women of every shape, color, and identity with spellbinding, vivid art.

Five self-contained comics utilize Nowak's charming, vibrant illustrations to expertly develop a one-of-a-kind plot. Comic-book medium aside, *Girl Town* is for girls who are at least in high school, as it explores adult themes and images.

In "Girl Town," the humorous politics of a neighborhood feud come to light. The heartwarming "Radishes" tells the story of two girls who play hooky and discover the nearby fantasy market, while "Diana's Electric Tongue" chronicles a love story between girl and robot. These are the collection's standout entries; each crafts a familiar but quirky universe with expert world-building. Tiger cafés in lieu of cat cafés; radishes with mystical powers—subtle but powerful creativity abounds.

Nowak plunges into the world of feminine friendships in earnest. The girls in this book are flawed, unique, and complex, just like real girls around the globe: They crack jokes, they make mistakes, they fall in love. As they grow, each story puts forth universal and necessary takeaways—ideas about accepting yourself and others, moving past trauma, or just remembering to have fun. In addition to their meaningful messages, the stories are laugh-out-loud funny. Pithy one-liners and deadpan humor fill the pages, complementing the collection's deeper side.

The art is truly gorgeous. Nowak illustrates with clean, crisp lines to create fresh, charming settings. Everything feels fluid; dynamic characters come to life. The skillful juxtaposition of panels and text allows for easy comprehension, and the color palette varies from story to story, always matching the atmosphere and tone.

Girl Town is a cerebral, spirited work of art.

MYA ALEXICE (November/December 2018)

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