



★ Little Darlings

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Sinister and sickeningly real, *Little Darlings* is fairy tale-inflected horror that explores postpartum depression. This new psychological thriller is a modern reimagining of a changeling story, with consequences that touch both the magical world and our own.

Birth is a nightmare, but Lauren Tranter's is a true horror. She delivers two healthy twins after an unbelievably hard labor. Her husband leaves her by herself in the hospital with the twins, where she struggles to breastfeed and care for the babies. The nights are the hardest, and she's not alone.

One night, an apparition visits Lauren: a filthy woman with a black tongue who smells like a cold riverbank. The stranger offers to trade one of her twins, hidden in "rags, a nest of grey swaddling," for one of Lauren's. Nobody will know. And, the woman says, she is *owed*.

From that moment, Lauren loses her grip on reality. Even police detective Joanna Harper, who begins following Lauren after she reports the "intruder," can't understand why the new mother's behavior is so unpredictable. Lauren, driven by her instincts, does battle with the fairy world—but she's on her own, and when she becomes convinced that one or both of her babies has been taken as changelings, all bets are off.

Little Darlings is full of stomach-turning moments that touch on our deepest, most instinctive fears and fairy tales. Tense, spooky scenes arise from everyday materials. Lauren's perspective, in particular, is blurry and self-aware. She doubts her sanity and doesn't understand why she can't seem to bond with her twins. She's exhausted, worn down by an endless "long night of lifting and swiveling and feeding ... cracking and bleeding and drying out only to be thrust into the hard, wet vice of her baby's latch." The vivid, visceral descriptions of early motherhood are realistic, which makes the novel's fairy tale elements even more believable.

Mothers who don't adore their babies are monstrous. In *Little Darlings*, Lauren fears that she's become the worst monster of all.

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