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Little Fish: A Memoir from a Different Kind of Year

Ramsey Beyer
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In simple graphic novel form, Beyer captures the transition from small-town life to big-city art school.

Lists, lists, lists. Ramsey Beyer loves to make lists. As she moves from her small town in Michigan to attend art school in Baltimore, her lists chronicle her trepidations and triumphs in simple black-and-white graphic novel format. As she grows from a new fish fresh from the "school" to a confident big city college student, she tells our own stories of that big move from high school to the real world.

Ramsey loves to write lists on her old manual typewriter. Her lists document everything about her life, including her love of punk music, her friends, her band and her life in rural Michigan. She admits she feels she is a big-city girl, so she chooses to go to school in Baltimore. She leaves behind her friends and her family, setting out to form new friendships and maybe even a new "family."

Beyer nails the fears that young people experience moving on after high school in this simple graphic novel done in black and white. Her emotions are real, and many young people who are moving from small towns to any sort of college experience will benefit from her lists of wisdom. That said, Beyer's lists are not cookie cutter lists of recommendations; they are lists of real life. For example, one of her lists was written in December of her freshman year in college and is titled, "The Best Things Are." Included are falling asleep with the sound of your friend's laughter in the living room, having a friend nickname her hat "cloud," and eating buffet at Eat Must Be First Chinese restaurant in downtown Baltimore. It is a simple, yet so telling, list about what it is like to create new experiences your freshman year at college.

The art is simple, yet detail abounds. Students are often shown relaxing in the living room, knitting, sitting with chopsticks and a carryout container nearby. The typewritten pages that the lists appear on were the actual pages that Beyer typed during her own freshman year at college. They appear with doodles and smudges, along with typos and corrections. These add charm and warmth to Beyer's lists.

This sweet, charmingly simple graphic novel will resonate with many young adults preparing to go off to school, and maybe even more strongly with those who have left their college years behind.
LYNN EVARTS (September 5, 2013)

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