



Little Pretty Things

Lori Rader-Day

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A dank roadside motel plays a central role in this murder mystery involving teenage girls, competition, and festering secrets.

In this well-written atmospheric mystery, Juliet Townsend has never left town after high school. As a runner in high school, Juliet always played second best to her close friend, Madeleine Bell. When Maddy reappears back in town for just enough time to get murdered, Juliet begins to dig into questions surrounding Maddy's success and discovers that far more was going on than she could have ever imagined her senior year in high school over a decade ago.

The real star in Rader-Day's book is the setting, particularly Townsend's work place, the Mid-Night Motel. It's dank and depressing, and it's where Juliet spends much of her time. The absolute depressive feeling of the place is summed up this way: "Now the Mid-Night was a step above a roadside dive. Technically, it 'was' a roadside dive. The motel was a big U of rooms with exterior doors on a wraparound walkway overlooking a couple of struggling crab apple trees that dropped messy fruit all over the sidewalks and drew noisy birds."

Through Juliet's hard-life lens, the small town that she never escaped is drastically magnified, as are the denizens of the town. The most colorful character is Teeny, the local pitiful creature who wanders the streets. We also get to know Lu; the Hispanic woman who also works at the Mid-Night; Coach and Fitz, track coaches on the verge of retirement; and patrol officer Courtney Howard.

Rader-Day elevates this book from a very serviceable murder mystery to a close examination of teenage girls, friendship, competition, and the damage that festering secrets can do. Rader-Day does an excellent job capturing the pain and dysfunction of high-school friendships. As Juliet spends more and more time looking into the situation that she overlooked as a senior, she learns more and more about the odd events that occurred right under her nose.

Fans of straight mysteries and young-adult readers of any age will appreciate Rader-Day's adept handling of teen issues even as she looks at them from ten years down the road.

LYNN EVARTS (Fall 2015)

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