



One Simple Thing

Warren Read

Ig Publishing (Jan 26, 2021)

Softcover \$16.95 (282pp)

978-1-63246-119-3

Rodney is a twelve-year-old with a predilection for adult comics who's stuck in Hope, a dead end Wyoming town. Nadine is a wary drifter on the run from life and failed relationships, shackled up in the backwoods of Washington state. Louis is a grizzled sheriff contending with age and a mentally addled brother. These three people seem to have nothing in common, but Warren Read intertwines their destinies in his slow-boiling thriller *One Simple Thing*.

The three-part tale is set in the mid-seventies and focuses on each hardscrabble character in turn. Rodney's life is upended when his mother shacks up with Otis, a local burger flipper who may have shady intentions; Nadine comes to grips with her itinerant existence when she begins to suspect that her ornery new beau, Lester, is mixed up with criminal activity; and Louis's investigation into the death of a total stranger threatens to place all of them in peril.

Evoking the feel of life in the prairie hinterlands, the book is often plainspoken, but also sometimes lyrical. Characterizations dominate the novel's early chapters, as Rodney falls under Otis's sway. There's a daring shift in the second act, which relocates to a new setting, with new characters; while these goings on aren't quite as resonant, they include plenty of intrigue. Multiple mysterious details are introduced: a Chinese couple may be getting smuggled into Canada, there's a dead man with a Russian passport, and there's a bloodied car trunk lid. The pace picks up as all of the characters and subplots converge in the explosive climax.

Closing with hard-won wisdom, *One Simple Thing* mixes compassion and hope among its suspenseful twists.

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