

Rare Birds

Kathleen Novak

The Permanent Press (Jun 30, 2017)

Hardcover \$28.00 (232pp)

978-1-57962-498-9

Lazy summer days are captured in this small-town, gently elegant novel.

Kathleen Novak's second novel, *Rare Birds*, is a lovely slice-of-life work that introduces myriad residents of a small town whose stories intersect.

The entire story takes place over eleven days in 1960 and effectively evokes the lazy summer days of a time when, for off-from-school kids, a trip to the grocery store was a daily highlight and "secret" often meant something well known but little acknowledged. Novak makes all her characters distinct and memorable.

Perhaps most memorable are Betty and Elise Larsen, the mother-daughter duo whose relationships form the story's center. Betty has been carrying on a longtime affair with Claus, Elise's biological father, who has a wife and daughters elsewhere in town. She craves male attention of any kind, while also hoping Claus could become a long-term option.

Meanwhile, Elise wants to make friends with the older girls in the neighborhood, like Katie, and that opportunity comes when a new girl, Sue Too, moves into town. The three girls become fascinated by an abandoned house nearby and form a secret club to investigate the mystery of what happened to its former occupants.

Novak's story is populated with more than a dozen other memorable characters: the cranky man who operates the town grocery and prefers to close early rather than deal with customers; a schizophrenic boy newly returned from a stint in an institution and who can't escape the cruel taunts of some neighbors; the friendly young girl who feels sympathy for him. A gang of teenage boys try to plan a perfect robbery, more out of boredom than any great ambition, while Katie's mother knows more about what goes on in town than she lets on.

Characters' lives interlock effectively in this book whose stakes always feel realistic. The short timeline underscores how seemingly small changes can have domino effects, especially in a place where everyone knows everyone else's business. Novak has a gently elegant writing style and an ear for dialogue that help to make *Rare Birds* a real treat.

JEFF FLEISCHER (July/August 2017)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.