

Secrets & Lies: A Riley Russell Mystery

L. C. Rooney

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Introducing an exciting new heroine, Secrets & Lies is a gripping mystery novel about a paralegal's quest for justice.

In L. C. Rooney's gratifying mystery novel *Secrets & Lies*, a freelance paralegal is forced to take on an investigation that feels too personal for her comfort.

Riley's ex-boyfriend, Chris, cheated on her with Victoria, whom he then began dating. When Victoria is killed, Chris is suspected of her murder. Further complicating the situation: the law firm that Riley often freelances for asks her to work on Chris's case. Though she's reluctant to get involved, Riley accepts the assignment. All the while, she's less sure of Chris's innocence than she proclaims to be.

Secrets & Lies is the first installment in a planned mystery series. As such, the book devotes some space to its set-up of both Riley's location and the people around her. Riley herself is a compelling heroine—funny, smart, sarcastic, and kind. Those who circle around her are also distinctive. Her best friend, Kate, secures attention via her confidence and no nonsense advice, helping to balance out Riley's conflicted struggles. And Marc and Cole—both strong-willed, mysterious, and wry—bring out different sides of Riley in their roles as a police officer and an employee of Chris's.

Marc and Cole are developed further as potential love interests for Riley, though the novel takes its time to tease out who her real partner will be. Indeed, the book's romantic undercurrents are a subtle highlight. More so than the book's mystery elements, they generate interest in future installments of the series, wherein the new couple's relationship is promised to continue flourishing.

Still, though Riley's world is an intriguing one, her investigation is less involving than her personal life. There's tension throughout its movements, though much of the story is also somewhat predictable. The identity of the murderer becomes clear early on, though it takes Riley much longer to come to the same realization as the audience.

Despite the lack of suspense around who the killer is, the narrative drops its central clues at a steady pace, interspersing them with red herrings to cloud the audience's certainty about the book's outcome. The question of whether a person can ever truly know another person underlies the tale, remaining potent even after the investigation is closed—and after Riley and her friends continue on with their lives.

Introducing an intriguing heroine (and her potential love interest), *Secrets & Lies* is an entertaining murder mystery that centers on a freelance paralegal's quest for justice.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (April 26, 2022)

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