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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ LITERARY

So L.A.

Bridget Hoida
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A protagonist's soul is revealed only through the expertise of a skilled writer capable of capturing every thought, mood, and emotion. In *So L.A.*, Bridget Hoida creates a poignant exploration of a grief-stricken artist's mind as she learns to accept the accidental rock-climbing death of her younger brother and the gradual demise of her marriage to a wealthy businessman.

Overwhelmed by internal conflict and bombarded by external stresses, Magdalena de la Cruz soothes her insecurities with alcohol and sedatives, while chasing the impossible dream of achieving her own physical perfection. In a candid, first-person story broken into lyrical, journal-like entries, this flawed, beautiful heroine reinvents herself in order to become a part of the Beverly Hills elite, a social circle few are privileged to enter. The expected friendships, romantic interludes, and sexual liaisons all make an appearance in this glitzy novel of thwarted expectations and opportunities.

Without traditional dialogue set in quotation marks, this literary endeavor has nothing in common with structured commercial fiction. Every character speaks with a distinctive voice embedded within the narrative. For example: *Don't play dumb with me, Puck said, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper. You may have the rest of the Southland fooled with your designer water and celluloid veneer, he shot me a sexy little wink, but every once in a while your Valley surfaces.* (italics added)

The easygoing style and tone of a diary make the story simple to absorb, especially as it is well written and error free: *Maybe my mother was right. Maybe it was time to go home to the brown ranch I grew up in, because suddenly I wanted nothing more than to crawl under the green-gingham bedspread of my childhood and sleep.* (italics added)

Magdalena may never come across as definitive or concise, but she is a lifelike personality in this subtle portrait of a tender woman's spirit in conflict with itself. Sheer will to live propels this traumatized individual to endure tremendous psychological pain under challenging circumstances.

An award-winning scholar and writer, Bridget Hoida holds a doctorate in literature and creative writing from the University of Southern California. *So L.A.* is her debut novel.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (July 24, 2012)

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