

The Letting Go

Deborah Markus

Sky Pony Press (Jul 17, 2018)

Hardcover \$16.99 (320pp)

978-1-5107-3405-0

Deborah Markus's *The Letting Go* is a fascinating story about a young woman trying to create a life for herself without the comfort of human connection.

At seventeen and with just one year left in school, Emily is a damaged girl, though she has a sharp tongue and a bright mind. When she was just four years old, her mother was murdered—followed by her father, her best friend, and even her dog.

Now she lives under an assumed name in a small boarding school. Her life is quiet, if not happy. A new girl wants to be her friend, but Emily, remembering the losses of her past, knows that it is far too dangerous to let the connection form. She immerses herself in the work of Emily Dickinson; she keeps the people in her life safe by holding them at a distance with cold treatment and cruel words. But then the headmistress finds a dead body in front of the school. Emily knows that the fresh death cannot be coincidental.

The plot is tense and riveting. The unseen murderer lurks behind every moment of the unconventionally formatted story, which is presented via Emily's journal—or, one of them; she keeps two notebooks. One starts just when the dead body is found; the second notebook is far shorter and encompasses the murders' resolution.

The first, linear notebook is the easier to follow; the second is disjointed and occasionally confusing as Emily sorts through what was, what is, and what might be. Though this notebook requires a bit more effort to decipher, it is a wonderfully effective vehicle for Emily's trauma.

The Letting Go is many things: wonderful, unique, sad, intelligent, creepy, and fun—and, most of all, impossible to put down.

CATHERINE THURESON (July/August 2018)

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