

★ **The Van Apfel Girls Are Gone****Felicity McLean**

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Containing summer friendships, whispered secrets, and a dark, hidden truth, Felicity McLean's *The Van Apfel Girls Are Gone* is poignant and jarring. Cordelia, Hannah, and Ruth Van Apfel's disappearances sear through the palpable heat of its Australian summer.

Tikka and Laura are sisters who carry heavy secrets from the summer when the Van Apfel girls vanished. Now adults, they try to untangle those secrets while battling deep guilt. Answers wait in the unopened mouths of the residents of their small community. Everyone has an opinion or clue regarding what became of the girls.

The missing girls have strikingly different personalities. Cordie is the sun whom everyone revolved around; Hannah, the wisest and most motherly; and Ruth is tiny but brave. Each girl's personality played a pivotal role in their fates, and each is developed with well-maintained depth. McLean's writing style is poetic and fluid, and her descriptions are tactile. Gripping and beautiful in its sadness, the text conveys the girls' fear and anxiety in a way that is tangible and eloquent.

The story weaves between the present day, where Tikka narrates and details her relationships with her family (especially her sister), and the past, with focus on the infamous summer when their lives changed forever. The Van Apfel household dichotomy is a blatant foreshadowing of events to come: patriarchal Mr. Van Apfel dominates, his behavior suffocating and his extreme religious beliefs and treatment of his wife and daughters appalling. The book's unpredictable ending is ideal.

*The Van Apfel Girls Are Gone* is extraordinary—a warm flashback to summer with a dark underbelly. Reading it is like opening a beautifully wrapped package while holding a deep, irrational fear of what lies inside. It is a blazingly well-written, impressive, and deeply satisfying thriller.

KATIE ASHER (July/August 2019)

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