



## The Water Tower Club: a novel

**B K Mayo**

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(274pp)

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*In this coming-of-age crime novel, suspense and tension run high, and chapters often end on cliffhangers.*

In B.K. Mayo's *The Water Tower Club*, true-to-life characters face the dark side of their small town with fear and conviction.

Darryl Coombs is summoned back to Grotin, Kansas to help his sister, Libby, get out of jail. Libby has been accused of stabbing Darryl's childhood enemy, Bobby Hobson. Figuring out why may help Darryl let go of his sad history.

Since moving to San Antonio ten years ago, Darryl has buried his past, which was defined by abandonment, humiliation, and a needy mom. He lives in the present, working as an accountant and enjoying a carefree love life. Back in Grotin, he is forced to confront the reasons he left.

Darryl narrates, and the text reads like a reluctant confession. He makes wide use of metaphors—imagining his story, more than analyzing it. Still, the prose is economical. Libby and Darryl's girlfriend both resist talking, particularly about their pasts, making what they don't say as relevant as what they do. Darryl's laborious attempts to overcome the silence around him echo in his attempts to piece together Libby's case.

The setting captures the story's mood. In the heat of the summer, wilting flowers outside of Darryl's motel show Grotin's desolate state and mimic Darryl's own fatigue. The infamous town water tower, which is the site of a painful hazing memory, symbolizes the highs and lows of what's at stake. While the mystery of the stabbing propels the text forward, the progression itself is not mysterious: Darryl is on a mission of intent.

Beginning with the moment Darryl's mother calls him home, his memories come flooding back. As he meets former acquaintances and starts his detective tasks, the story moves at a one step forward, two steps back pace. Darryl plays whack-a-mole with clues; suspense and tension are high, and chapters often end on cliffhangers.

Alternating between the present and the past, the book situates the central crime in the context of bigger conflicts. Its themes, including environmental and sex crises, are timely and prescient. The past and present converge in a violent climax that leaves one end tantalizingly loose.

*The Water Tower Club* is both a crime novel and an adult coming-of-age story in which the future is built out of the lessons of the past.

MARI CARLSON (March 20, 2019)

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