

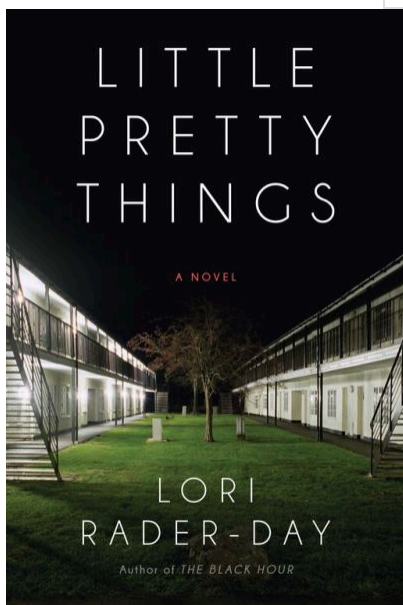


Book Review: 'Little Pretty Things' – A Mystery Novel by Lori Rader-Day

Posted by: [Suzanne Brazil](#) July 5, 2015 in [Book Reviews](#), [Books](#), [Fiction](#), [Mystery and Thriller](#), [Top Stories](#)

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"I'd already known there existed a breed of woman who made the rest of us notice how far off the mark we were, but they didn't often stumble into the Mid-Night. This woman was their queen. Her clothes draped as if they'd been trained. Her golden hair hung loose and perfectly careless. She was tall and angular, with a chiseled masterpiece of a jaw."

Class reunions are either hotly anticipated or quietly dreaded. Did the homecoming queen age gracefully? Did the mousy girl from English class blossom into a swan? What about the friendships we let fade away or the rivalries and resentments we let fester? What happens when everyone comes home but not everyone survives?

In *Little Pretty Things*, Juliet Townsend has failed to live up to her literary namesake or her potential. She ignores the invitation to her 10 year high school reunion, focusing instead on her motel housekeeping job at the one-star Mid-Night Inn. Juliet and her coworkers refer to their patrons as "bargains" or "desperates" and cleaning up after them is not what she dreamed of upon graduation. But the death of her father and her mother's failure to fully recover are just two of the anchors weighing her down in her hometown of Midway, Indiana.

On a typical night shift, Juliet's future and memories of her past are forever altered when Madeleine Bell, her former best friend and track rival, appears at the Mid-Night attempting a reconciliation. After graduation, Maddie escaped Midway's averageness, making good with a job in the big city, expensive clothes and a sparkling diamond engagement ring. But the past isn't always easy to remember and even harder to forgive. Once again, Juliet feels she finished behind Maddie in all the ways that matter.

By the next morning, any second chance at salvaging an old friendship is shattered when Juliet stumbles upon Maddie's lifeless body and a hidden clue left just for her. With the suspicious eyes of the community and the police focusing on Juliet as a logical suspect, she searches her memories realizing that revisiting the past may be the only way to prove her innocence. But not everyone is happy to have her poking around old yearbooks and playing amateur detective. Juliet will soon find out she has more to lose than she thought, and she's not the only one in danger.

[Lori Rader-Day's](#) protagonist tells her story with the unflinching and self-aware tone of the inhabitants of places like Midway "named for the fact that it wasn't one place or another. We were halfway to anywhere that mattered, stuck." As with her award winning debut novel, *The Black Hour*, Rader-Day shows an affinity with the downtrodden and a remarkable sense of atmosphere and place. If you didn't grow up in a place like Midway, you've certainly driven past one, happy that it wasn't your final destination.

Another similarity to her first novel is that the answer to the "whodunit" isn't the main attraction. Rader-Day is plugged into the psyches of the misfits and also-rans. We root for Juliet to not only solve the crime but to alter her own course, redeem herself, to get to somewhere that matters. Like a paper cut, Rader-Day's second novel lingers with the reader, sharp, stinging and impossible to forget.

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About Suzanne Brazil



Suzanne M. Brazil is a freelance writer and editor living in a recently empty nest in the suburbs of Chicago. Her work has been featured in Chicken Soup for the Soul, Writer's Digest, The Daily Herald and many local publications. She is a frequent blog contributor and is working on the second draft of her first novel.

