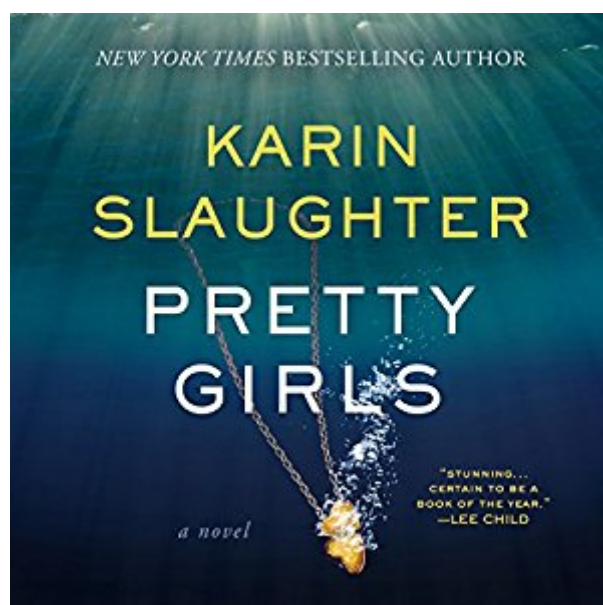


The book was found

Pretty Girls



Synopsis

Sisters. Strangers. Survivors. More than twenty years ago, Claire and Lydia's teenaged sister Julia vanished without a trace. The two women have not spoken since, and now their lives could not be more different. Claire is the glamorous trophy wife of an Atlanta millionaire. Lydia, a single mother, dates an ex-con and struggles to make ends meet. But neither has recovered from the horror and heartbreak of their shared loss—a devastating wound that's cruelly ripped open when Claire's husband is killed. The disappearance of a teenage girl and the murder of a middle-aged man, almost a quarter-century apart: what could connect them? Forming a wary truce, the surviving sisters look to the past to find the truth, unearthing the secrets that destroyed their family all those years ago . . . and uncovering the possibility of redemption, and revenge, where they least expect it. Powerful, poignant, and utterly gripping, packed with indelible characters and unforgettable twists, *Pretty Girls* is a masterful novel from one of the finest writers working today. Included with this gripping thriller is Karin Slaughter's chilling short story "Blonde Hair, Blue Eyes."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This story starts off with a letter written by a grief-stricken father to his missing teenage daughter. She had disappeared years earlier under very suspicious circumstances but the police were in doubt whether or not she had been just a runaway. We soon find out that the missing girl was named Julia and she had two sisters. After Julia disappeared, her family seemed to fall apart. The older sister Lydia had gone on to a life filled with drugs and alcohol and she became alienated from the

younger sister named Claire, who went on to marry a successful yet odd man she had known from school. The parents had divorced and the mother remarried. The father had dedicated his life to search for the missing Julia. As the story goes on, Claire and Lydia reunite and go on to try to solve the mystery of their sister Julia's disappearance. In order to do this, they must throw out all their preconceived ideas about their past and about the people who are supposed to be on their side, helping them. I read a book by this author several years ago and thought she showed some good writing chops, even though for my taste it had too much graphic violence. For some reason I thought this book was going to be a little different but instead the pornography and explicit violence were just off the charts. I am not a prude when it comes to reading about this sort of thing and I have read and enjoyed many books about serial killers and their ilk - but this one felt so gratuitous and been-done-before. Putting aside my discomfort with that aspect, what did I think about the story? I never bought into it at all. I've been in the criminal justice field for all of my professional life and this story was just...ridiculous - full of coincidences, nonsensical cabals, plot contrivances and people who are supposed to have brains acting like they don't have any. The women in this book often act feisty and talk sassy even when it's in their self-interest to behave otherwise. Their actions seemed so self-destructive and foolishly impulsive and the author really had to stretch the logic to make them do what they did, without their seeking proper help. The main villain? I get it, he was a true sexual psychopath - but he and the whole situation with him and others never felt realistic. What I can say in the book's behalf is that this is an author who knows how to hold a reader's interests. Aside from the difficulty I had with the believability of the plot, the author has a way with words and dialogue that feel natural and easy. I would love to read something by her that toned down the violence and didn't have the plot holes and flaws that this one does.

Years ago I was obsessed with more general titles of mass fiction, particularly crime and detective novels. I didn't realize there was better reading to be found. I admit that Jeffrey Deaver and Patricia Cornwell were favorites. And while there is nothing wrong with mass market fiction, it seemed stale quite fast. Authors also tried to up the shock value with each book in what inevitably was a series. With life being hard, I realized I didn't want to read such depressing and at times depraved reading. That's when I focused on lesser known authors and titles, with a draw towards translated fiction. However, recently I was sent an ARC of *Pretty Girls*, a book that promised a deep mystery about a serial killer. I don't know why, but I fell for it. One lazy afternoon, I curled up with it. At first, the premise was intriguing. A father of a missing daughter is writing a long letter to her, to let her know what she missed while absent. Not knowing whether she was dead or alive, he

persisted. From that we see the rest of the family and how they reacted to the loss. Two remaining daughters go in different directions, forever marked from the loss and the constant wondering about her whereabouts. The sisters, Claire and Lydia, are as different as possible. One tough and able, moving forward despite addiction issues and violence. The other, simply checking out of life to let her amazing husband make all decisions for her and spending her time as a socialite. Both women still seethe with rage but keep it hidden. Now, stop if you are wary of spoilers. I won't be too specific, but I will try and explain why this is one of the most appalling books I've ever read. Instead of giving up, I had to continue reading to see if it was truly as awful as I imagined. It was. After Claire's husband dies, her life unravels quickly, and it's discovered that her husband was not as he seemed. She handles this by falling apart, finally reaching out to her distant sister Lydia (found urinating on his grave) to help her figure out what to do. From here the novel dissolves into a violence-soaked whodunit wherein both sisters fight and argue while at the same time trying to solve the problem and see if they can find their lost sister too. Improbability becomes the underlying theme. Claire is an especially bizarre character: smart but without a shred of emotion (except tennis-invoked rage). She's benign and boring, and her existence is pinned to her outrageous beauty. She's unsympathetic and spoiled. Her beauty is mentioned endlessly, as Lydia's chubby body is as well. I'll get back to this, it's important! What ensues next is an urgently-paced effort to find the killer, one who rapes women with machetes and uses waterboarding as torture with his own urine. Yes, you read that right. Branding, dismembering, burning skin: ho hum. It becomes so common, nearly every page, that one stops being shocked. And that's what disturbed me the most. I felt sick, like I was contributing to such violence just by reading this. Was it giving potential serial killers ideas? Was this misogyny intended to make us reflect on the wonderful sisterhood that tries to rid the planet of the monster? Or reflect simply on horrifying images? Did the female author find it necessary to use this to fuel our interest? To show that women are most often the victims of violent crime? Maybe she had a message, but it's lost in the violence itself. One thing I noted was that nearly all the women in the story face such brutality. They are graphically described by their body parts, what happens to them, and inventive ways to torture them. They are literally in pieces. Unlike anything you think you've seen on Forensic Files or any number of horror films. And they are categorized with generic labels: either beautiful, or fat, or well-dressed, or frumpy, or rich, or poor. No further explanation or revelation. Labels. From a female author, that was a surprise. And yet, the men. The men in the story remain fully functional. Their bodies are not chipped away at. They are not described in such helpless positions with no way of escape. They remain whole, despite a whole bunch of women hanging

from cattle hooks, disemboweled, and violated. In fact, the only real comment the author makes about the men in the novel is a strange obsession with their mustaches, commenting on nearly every single one. And they are not given superficial labels. Of course, this "mystery" is of the "no one can be trusted" variety and yet very little makes it where you care. As it appears, beyond the suspension of disbelief, is that everyone is a criminal. It's too vast a conspiracy with little explanation for how it began. Events in the first part are never tied to latter parts. Motive is what appears to be lacking. The author then tries to solve it and tie it up in a few last improbable chapters that are actually laughable. The sisters try and save each other in a last ditch effort at unity but are so dazzlingly naïve that you want to smack them yourself. It is refreshing that the problem is solved by two women rather than the inevitable bored male detective who usually comes in to save the day. But that's not enough to salvage this gory mess. And of course, everyone lives happily ever after. I'm off mystery novels like this now for a good long time, if not forever. A violent world surrounds us, so sinking into this sewer of ugliness is not going to make anyone feel good. Except perhaps a serial killer who is bored and looking to up his game (for which this may serve as a "how to" manual. It's that awful. I don't know how popular this author is, probably very, but in my small little voice I have to say what she's written is disturbing and hateful and as misogynistic as anyone could be accused of being. She's not done a service for women by creating characters that solve crime, she's created women that are eternal victims, who even in their victory are disappointing and weak. That itself is a crime. The author's last name? Slaughter. Go figure that one out. If it's a pseudonym, I can't imagine a more apt one. Thanks, but no thanks, to Century Publishers for the Review Copy.

This will be a short review. I simply cannot believe that at the time of this review's writing, 56% of the reviewers gave it five stars. I find this to be one of the most gratuitously violent, sadistic, and misogynistic books I have ever had the misfortune to read. I have read all of Ms. Slaughter's books, and although they have been uniformly violent, this one is over the top in so many ways. Worse than that, it is a totally unrealistic and unbelievable plot, with characters whose personalities shift to fit the action. Lastly, the degradation of women as a theme is repulsive.

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