



Arcadia Falls

Carol Goodman

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Financial straits and a desire for a fresh start take recently widowed Meg Rosenthal and her aloof teenage daughter, Sally, to Arcadia Falls, a tucked-away hamlet in upstate New York where Meg has accepted a teaching position at a boarding school. The creaky, neglected cottage they'll be calling home feels like an ill omen, but Meg is determined to make the best of it. Then a shocking crisis strikes: During Arcadia's First Night bonfire, one of Meg's folklore students plunges to her death in a campus gorge. Sheriff Callum Reade finds the presumed accident suspicious, but then, he is a man with a dark past himself. Meg is unnerved by Reade's interest in the girl's death, and as long-buried secrets emerge, she must face down her own demons and the danger threatening to envelop Sally. As the past clings tight to the present, the shadows, as if in a terrifying fairy tale, grow longer and deadlier.

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Arcadia Falls Details

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From Reader Review Arcadia Falls for online ebook

Sandie says

Forced by the untimely death of her husband to accept a teaching position at an isolated East Coast boarding school called ARCADIA, Meg Rosenthal finds herself immersed in the turmoil surrounding two deaths at the school. One death, that of the schools founder Lily Eberhardt, happened years ago while the other occurs during Megs first weeks at the school.

Through the accidental discovery of a journal written by Lily, Meg uncovers not only the history of ARCADIA's inception as an artist colony for women and its later metamorphosis into a private girls' school, she also becomes privy to the unusual relationship between the schools original founders. With elements of pagan ceremonies and witchcraft not to mention the revelation of long buried secrets, author Carol Goodman immerses the reader in an atmosphere teeming with a sinister and malevolent glow.

For readers with a taste for tales of love and revenge told with a gothic flair ARCADIA FALLS will more than satisfy their reading palate. This is primarily a story of relationships.....those between friends, between mothers and daughters, between students and teachers. It is also a taut allegory imbued with fairy tales and folklore that mask actual social and personal circumstances. This story within a story moves back and forth between the present and the past, as secrets long hidden are resurrected posing imminent danger to our protagonist Meg Rosenthal and her teenaged daughter, Sally. Displaying her storytelling prowess, Ms. Goodman has given us a cast of multi-faceted and well defined, but not necessarily likable, characters and a final reveal containing a myriad of twists and turns plus enough suspense to keep her readers mesmerized.
3 1/2 stars

Carissa says

This book was choppy and uneven. Occasionally you would get drawn into certain scenes or characters, but other times the poor metaphors and overdone references to modern technology or pop culture made it feel heavy-handed. The climax scenes were ridiculously written, like a bad lifetime movie, but other plot-advancing scenes of exploration and observation could be fairly intriguing. I wish the depth and moodiness of some of these moments persisted, and that characters could become more real and fleshed out and less so blank proxies for the reader to port themselves into.[return][return]This could not have been more obviously written for middle-aged women, and while I understand that's the target audience, it became downright pandering at times. It feels like Goodman is churning these out based on a formulaic framework for this sort audience/novel. I would love a more developed, thoughtful and deep version of this book, as I thought the concept and setting were really cool and could be done further justice.

Kurt says

Carol Goodman is not an author I read for innovation and surprise. This novel, with its setting in a boarding school in a beautiful and secluded area of upstate New York, where an over-educated protagonist uses her knowledge of a specific art form (in this case, early-20th century U.S. folklore) to solve a mystery with ties to the past and the present, is so derivative of Goodman's earlier works that it feels more like a third draft than a separate novel - but I loved it anyway. Goodman's power does not lie in her mysteries themselves - the villains tend to be easy to spot, the secrets of the past fairly obvious to readers while the protagonist fumbles

through a half-hearted investigation - but in the lyricism of her prose and the enchanting way that she develops her settings. For all that the school in this book echoes the artists' colony in *The Ghost Orchid* and the school in *The Lake of Dead Languages* (and even the hotel in *The Seduction of Water*), it still presents unique features that make it unforgettable, like the way the paths and trees and buildings create a living fairy tale, and the constant silent threat of the dramatic cliffs and waterfall.

The mother-daughter heart of the story also rings very true, as Goodman presses on parallels between traditional changeling stories and inevitable personality shifts when young people enter their teen years. Goodman also uses the family structure at the heart of the book as a way to humanize recent current events, with the father as a man who gave up his artistic dreams for a Wall Street job that would provide material security for his family (but pays the price shortly before the book begins).

My only real complaint with the book was the pacing of the parallel story from a historical figure's diary. While the writing style of the diary was relatively realistic (a great improvement over *The Night Villa*), the protagonist only covered a few pages at a time. Of course, this slow pace was for Goodman to have time to develop her present-day mystery without her characters learning the truth too quickly, but it was distractingly frustrating when the protagonist lacked the work ethic to put in a solid evening of reading (after all, she couldn't disrupt her busy schedule of.. not preparing lesson plans, not pursuing a romance, and not interacting with her distant daughter). If the diary had somehow been split into sections that were discovered separately, that could have allowed Goodman to maintain her intended pace in a slightly more plausible way.

Cleverly says

I am sitting here trying to figure out the best way to start this review. So I am just going to jump into the characters. Meg is a recent widow whom sometimes I find annoying. At times I felt she was making choices that shock me. Then other times she seems so strong willed about finding her way after her husband is gone. Such as finding a new job packing up and moving herself and her daughter to the school where she would teach.

Sally also seemed to annoy me. She seemed like a brat. Even though I got that her father just died but she seemed to ALWAYS take it out on her mother. She seemed to have a turn around later in the book which let me dislike her a little less.

Both Sally and Meg fit so well into the book it made it come to life. So they maybe annoying at times but it worked for the book.

All the characters were well rounded and played well into the book.

As for the plot, Well I don't want this to turn people off from this book because it did finally build up. The beginning was slow paced, But mid-way through it went flying. It had me guessing. Nothing ended up being what I thought was going to happen.

The book had so many great aspects, Forbidden Love, Murder, Deceit, mystery. You were definitely left thinking about this book.

Anne says

I wanted to like this book better than I did. Described as an "enthraling work of literary fiction that follows a mother and daughter as they uncover the sinister secrets of an isolated boarding school", I expected a gripping plot with rich, descriptive prose. Instead I was frustrated by a plodding, unbelievable story line. It particularly bothered me that the untimely death of a student at the school barely evoked an emotional

response from the characters, let alone the parents of the student (or the parents of other students), who remained completely off the pages. Wouldn't there be a bit of an uproar if a student died because of what could be seen as negligence by the school?

It also irritated me how the secret diary was treated. It had the answer to this mystery, and yet the mother reads it bit by bit, day by day, instead of devouring it. If I was her, I would have skipped ahead to find out the secret instead of leaving it and worrying about it being found by others.

This book was an advance reader edition provided for free. Unfortunately, the storytelling did not live up to its billing for me.

Carla says

I am interested in the real female artists who inspired this story (Violet Oakley, Jessie Wilcox Smith, Elizabeth Shippen Green) so I hoped to love this book. There were great moments, a nice romance, and a good creepy death at the start, but the backstory and the modern mother-daughter story didn't quite mesh. And, the ending was, as the heroine herself admits, too far-fetched.

Tara Chevrestt says

For those that enjoy both historical fiction and mystery, this is a good choice. Tho most of it takes place in a contemporary town called Arcadia Falls, the modern day murder mystery parallels a murder that occurred in the 1930s.

The modern day heroine is Meg. She is newly widowed and struggling both financially and emotionally and arrives at Arcadia's private art school with her sullen teenage daughter in tow where she proceeds to teach and unravel two murder mysteries. The modern day murder of a teenage girl parallels the murder of an artist in the 1930s. Both young women may have been pushed off a cliff. Could the same person be responsible for both?

Fans of historical fiction will enjoy the excerpts from the 1930s told from the dead lady's journal. The journal contains struggling artists, lesbian lovers, abandoned babies, and a love triangle turned sour.

This fails to hit the five star mark for me namely because half of the characters are bratty teenagers that I felt needed a good talking to. If in my teenage years, I had run to a bar with a fake i.d. and got a tattoo in a seedy parlor, I would not have been allowed to return to my dorm with just a mere few words of scolding nor simple dish duty as punishment. I found that just a bit implausible.

Thus, four stars. Higly recommended for those who want a murder mystery minus the blood and gore.

I won this thru goodreads and I'm very pleased with my first book win.

Lizzie Hayes says

'Arcadia Falls' by Carol Goodman

Published by Piatkus, February 2011. ISBN: 978-0-7499-4242-7

Following her husband's death Meg Rosenthal leaves the wealthy East Coast with her daughter Sally and joins the staff of a smart private school, Arcadia College to teach and pursue her academic fascination with folklore and nineteenth century literature.

Arcadia College, set in a valley against the side of a mountain and on three side's thickly wooded countryside, was the home of Vera Beecher who established it in 1928 as a colony for artists to develop their talents, particularly female artists, although Virgil Nash was somehow included. Now run by Dean Ivy St Clare Meg quickly discovers Vera and her beliefs are still very much alive. Meg is allocated a cottage in the woods in which Vera and her friend Lily Eberhardt lived for nineteen years until tragedy struck in 1947 when Lily died. The cottage in the woods is frequently shrouded in mist and evoked a fitting environment for the theme running through the book which is the disturbing tale of 'The Changeling Girl' and the many interpretations that can be placed on the story.

To continue her own studies Meg obtains from Ivy, Vera's diaries, and later discovers Lily's journal, in which she reads, 'we came to paradise already carrying the seeds of its destruction.

The style of the setting was, to me reminiscent of 'Miss Pym Disposes' probably evoked by the vivid characterisation of the female students. Within a day of Meg settling in one of the students is found dead.

This is both a beautiful piece of writing and an intriguing mystery to which one must reach back to the past for a solution. I was totally transported to the period and found myself looking over my shoulder as the suspense built to a frightening level.

Carol Goodman gives the reader a thought provoking tale and an interesting mystery to which she provides a satisfying conclusion, but the tale of The Changeling Girl and its interpretations may remain with you a long time.

I cannot recommend this book to highly, it is a must read.

Lizzie Hayes

Adrienne says

UGH! The only reason I'm putting this on Good Reads is TO SAVE YOU because if you read the back, it sounds like a book that is interesting, gothic, and has a good mystery. It ends up trying to beat you over the head with about a billion different moral platitudes, not to mention a complete disintegration of narrative thread, and implausible "tying it all together" in the end. Plotholes big enough to drop a truck through, and (my biggest bug) 2 different narrative voices, that actually sound THE SAME. Awful awful. Do not waste your time. I saw people were giving it 3 or 4 stars which boggles my mind.

Amanda says

This was an advanced reader's copy I received through LibraryThing

In the beginning, I really wanted to love this book. I really, really did. Toward the middle of the book, I was just hoping to like it. By the end, I was ready to bid it a not-so-fond farewell and move on to something else. The novel sounds as though it's tailor made for me: there's the strained mother/daughter relationship, the pastoral setting at a private school for the arts, dark and eerie fairytales, a judicious dollop of death, and a mystery from the past that is being explored in the present. It's an ambitious mix and, in the end, the novel is weakened by its interwoven plot lines as it desperately tries to tie everything up into a neat little bundle.

Meg Rosenthal is trying to build a new life in the wake of her husband's unexpected death. Even more unexpected is that he mismanaged their finances and, despite the lavish lifestyle to which they were accustomed, he left them with virtually nothing. In the middle of her PhD in literature, Meg sells everything they own and moves her bitter and distant daughter, Sally, to Arcadia Falls, the site of a private school for the arts where she has been offered a teaching position. The job is ideal for Meg as she is studying the feminist fairytales written and illustrated by the school's founders, Vera Beecher and Lily Eberhardt. Sixty or so years ago, Lily died under peculiar circumstances while going to meet her lover, Virgil Nash, and her body wasn't recovered for several months. While it appeared as though she fell off a cliff during a blizzard, rumors and gossip have circulated in the art community and in the small town of Arcadia Falls for years as to whether Lily's death was just an accident. When a young student, Isabel Cheney, falls to her death (in the exact same way Lily did so many years earlier) during the pagan celebration that traditionally opens the new school year at Arcadia, the questions about Lily's death resurface and Meg finds the key to unraveling the truth about what really happened at Arcadia.

The book is beautifully written, although Goodman does have a tendency to throw in too much minutiae that slows down the pace of the story. Other problems that I had with the novel include:

A) Weak, one dimensional characters. The school dean, Ivy St. Clare, walks around the school with apparently little to do other than harass Meg (which begs the question of why she would hire her to begin with). She's so obviously the villain that I'm surprised she didn't walk around rubbing her hands together and cackling with all her maniacal might. Sally is the stereotypical sullen teenager who hates her mother, hates her new school, hates the new town, hates their new house, and, well, just hates everything. Then there's the town sheriff, Callum Reade, our knight in shining armor who shows up occasionally so Meg can get irritated with him without knowing why and he can get irritated with her without knowing why and then they can have sex later without knowing why. I didn't give a rat's ass about any of them.

B) Meg is also an unlikable character. She seems passive, just allowing things to happen to her. At the school, she shrinks away from or avoids any situation in which she might have to act like an adult authority figure. She spends her days reading Lily's journal and never seems to have any actual teaching responsibilities. She occasionally comes up with a lesson plan while crossing the school campus, but that's about it.

C) Meg finds Lily's hidden diary and, while reading it, begins to piece together the events that led to Lily's tragic death. However, she takes for-eh-ver to read it (I would have had that puppy read in one night) and I found the story in the diary to be far superior to the one in present day. Lily and Vera were lovers, but Lily also fell under the spell of Virgil Nash, the painter for whom she became a muse. This love triangle and these characters are far more intriguing, but sadly take a backseat to Meg and Sally.

D) The book seems to want to be in the gothic or magical realism genre, but just can't quite bring itself to commit. This just pissed me off because it was billed as both.

E) So many things are just half-assed: Isabel's death is forgotten as soon as it happens, the folk legend of the white woman of the falls is a bizarre little footnote, a promising character named Toby Potter is made unforgettable and then readily forgotten, etc.

F) Women in this book have a nasty habit of running to the cliff when in danger. It's akin to the slasher film phenomenon of the beautiful girl running upstairs instead of out the front door. Everyone knows disaster happens at the cliff, but they take off like lemmings for it when things go wrong.

G) I had the end figured out halfway through the book. I won't spoil it for you, but I saw that one coming from about twenty miles away and it requires some serious suspension of disbelief. At one point the main character says, "I have to admit it all sounds a little far-fetched." And to that I say, spot on, Meg, spot on.

Cross posted at This Insignificant Cinder

Educating Drew says

For the most part I want to say: Wow. Oh wow! This novel is so-o-O amazing and so-o-O beautiful I was immediately drawn in. Plus, it's multilayered, so it's like getting two books in one. Always a good deal, right. But that's for the most part. I'll get to the least part in a few...

meg just recently lost her husband and moves to a remote boarding school (Arcadia Falls) in upstate New York with her typical moody, morose, and artistic teenaged daughter, Sally. Meg is pretty excited about the job as instructor because (a) she's never really had a job since Sally was born and has no idea how else to support the two of them and (b) Meg is working on her dissertation on fairy tales in 19th century woman's literature and one of the women that she is studying happens to be a co-founder to Arcadia Falls.

Now that's the forefront of the story: Meg and Sally in Arcadia Falls and the mystery surrounding a death (or two) during the pagan traditions honored by the school. The underlying story of the co-founders of Arcadia Falls (lovers Lily and Vera) are more than just a backdrop as the past catapults itself into the center of the mysterious deaths.

I really loved the story of Lily and Vera as much as I did Meg and Sally's. Lily and Vera not only manage Arcadia Falls but they write and illustrate a fairy tale, "The Changeling", which is shared throughout the novel. "The Changeling", from my understanding is a common literary convention used in fairy tales where a character is replaced by a mirrored alternative. I had little information about fairy tales, and this book definitely made me start googling left and right for more bits and information. Plus, I felt like I was being taught by Meg when she would lecture some of the students, and hell, her activities were pretty cool. I wished I was at Arcadia Falls.

So here's the thing. There were bits and pieces of this book where I would read a chapter and then zone out. Man, it was that beautiful. My mind did not want to read further but I didn't want to leave the mood that it thrust me into. I can only compare it to those moments when you're sitting in a warm bubble bath and you know that this must be heaven. That relaxed feeling? Where your eyes are halfway open and halfway closed and your mind is just THERE? In that moment? It was kinda like that.

Plus, pulling literature into literature is a convention that I absolutely adore and Goodman does that plenty. I mean, what?! The setting is a boarding school. Of course there is homework and references!

And now you're probably wondering that I did open implying there were aspects of the novel that I just did not dig as much as I dug the rest...it's true. Don't you get terribly frustrated when an author is being brilliant and then the brilliance seems to be an insecurity so they try to one-up themselves only to reach fail status? Well, that's kinda sorta what happened here. There were twists and turns and I felt exhilarated and rushed and gasped for air. Fingers were gripped against the book because I didn't figure it out. And then, when the

ride should have slowed down, it kept going. At full speed. No longer was I screaming and ooooohing and ahhhhhhing, but I was a twelve year old kid who had just eaten hot dogs and cotton candy and soda. I wanted off of the ride about thirty pages earlier.

Still a good read? Sho e'nuff! In fact, better then good. But not great. Plus, I'm totally gonna check out some more Goodman.

And I'm really stoked that I've found this whole new genre of books that I'm getting into. I want more literary fiction where they bring in folklore and fairy tales. What you got for me?

Linda says

Arcadia Falls is a book to get lost in. Author Goodman takes here signature themes, women, water, and academia, and wraps them in a Russian doll of a fairy tale. But it's a fairy tale for adults, and it's a tautly plotted mystery as well. Having lost her husband, and most of their money along with him, Meg Rosenthal must give up grad school, where she's been working on her thesis about folk stories, and start anew with her grieving and angry teenage daughter, Sally. Meg lands a job teaching lit at a remote girls' school in upstate New York, which was founded originally as an art colony. Coincidentally, one of the stories she's been studying, about a changeling, was written and illustrated by Lily Eberhardt, a co-founder of the institute. Lily set the story in Arcadia Falls, and Meg recognizes all the physical elements at once, finding herself drawn into Lily's world. When first a student dies of a fall, and Meg finds Lily's hidden journal, her absorption grows intense.

Few writers are capable of creating atmosphere as well as Goodman. Her imagery is so evocative that you find yourself thinking in those same images. At Arcadia Falls, those images are overwhelmingly feminine. The names of the major characters are taken from folklore and mythology. The "pagan" rituals that the students so enjoy, as at Samhain and Beltane, are meaningful and ominous. At times, certain characters find their identities becoming entwined with those long dead. This is a dreamy but fast paced novel with a jolt of a surprise right in the middle. It seems history can repeat itself. And reaching the final page is like coming home.

Jlaurenmc says

Carol Goodman is known for her gothic, fictional portraits of academia. Her latest release, Arcadia Falls, is no exception. The novel begins as Meg Rosenthal and her daughter Sally travel from their over-sized, suburban home in Great Neck, New York, to the small upstate town of Arcadia. Meg lost her husband Jude last year, and neither she nor Sally has yet dealt with their grief. The two move so that Meg can take a teaching job at a private fine arts boarding school just outside of town called Arcadia Falls. Meg has been working on her doctoral thesis, which examines the literature and artwork of the school's founders, Vera Beecher and Lily Eberhardt. Vera and Lily wrote and illustrated now-out-of-print children's books, particularly fairy tales --the primary focus of Meg's research.

The mother-daughter pair enters the grounds of Arcadia Falls with an already strained relationship; Sally spends most of her time with ear buds inserted and iPod on. Their move from suburban mall-topia to middle-of-nowhere upstate New York does little to mend their bond. Meg hopes she and Sally can find some common ground, and that Sally will renew her interest in drawing. Sally soon takes up with a small circle of friends at the school, but rather than bringing her closer to her mother, it seems to have the opposite affect.

She requests a move into a free spot in the dorms with her friends, and Meg feels unable to deny her this opportunity to fit in.

Soon after the Rosenthals move to Arcadia, Meg begins to sense something sinister shrouding the school grounds. Goodman employs descriptive writing to effectively create an atmosphere that is rich with foreboding. As the novel progresses, the reader has an increasingly heightened sense of suspense. While the novel illustrates many traits of an old-fashioned thriller/ mystery, Goodman includes a great deal of art- and literature-related references that push Arcadia Falls to a higher level than most books in the mystery genre. What results is an intelligently written, sufficiently creepy novel with plot twists and turns that keep the reader guessing how things will be resolved.

Another effective method Goodman uses in Arcadia Falls is the novel-within-a-novel technique. She includes within the text a private journal of Lily Eberhardt's in its entirety, as well as one of the fairy tales Lily and Vera Beecher published. Both the journal entries and the story "The Changeling" provide subplots, but also add to the larger story. Meg's research requires her to find any and all resources of information about the two artists, but their story becomes intertwined with the current residents of Arcadia Falls, as well. "The Changeling" not only provides clues about the school and founders' history, but is also presented within the novel as a beloved family fairy tale for Meg as a young girl, and later for Sally.

Bridget says

Meg is trying to push forward in life and Sally is closing herself off. Meg is unhappy that the two of them have drifted so far apart and with the death of Meg's husband, Sally's father, the bridge between them has been closed off.

Meg wants to move to a new place and start a new life. Money troubles just reinforce the need to move on. Meg accepts a job as a teacher and is desperately trying to make the best of the cards she has been dealt.

When one of Meg's students dies during a bonfire and the sheriff feels that foul play may be the cause, she learns that everyone has skeletons in their closet and some will kill to keep that closet locked.

This stunning book is the work of a truly artistic writer. I plunged into this novel and almost suffocated because I didn't want to come up for air. Read it in one sitting if you can. Consider yourself warned:)

Chris says

At first glance, I wasn't sure this would be the sort of book I might normally read...which makes me wonder, what *IS* the type of book I would normally read and what were my assumptions going into this book. The basic synopsis sets the book up to be a sort of mother-daughter relationship book combined with a sort of self-discovery and some peripheral romance and mystery thrown in. With that sort of description, it sounds like it might border on "chick-lit" and be a little too sentimental for my taste. But for some reason, the more in-depth details of the premise intrigued me.

Meg Rosenthal (the mother) has taken a teaching position at a reclusive, semi-art-commune boarding school while she works to finish her PhD in literature (with a focus on fairy tales, especially 20th century fairy tales). The school is filled with strange myths and legends including a strange death of one of the founders

(Lily) 60+ years ago that unraveled the life of the other founder (Vera...also Lily's lover). I think perhaps I was drawn by the suggestion of a literary mystery along with a sort of magical realism as myth and reality intertwine.

The first chapter or two had to work hard to pull me in and get me interested in the characters but the writing was eloquent and lovely and a pleasure to read (though sometimes the descriptions, while poetic and beautiful, slowed down the pace of the plot and made me want to skip ahead). The characters were interesting but sometimes alternated between predictable or a little too dense. At times I felt like I saw their motivations coming from pages away and at other times I wanted to smack them to take the next obvious move. Most of the time, the characters were intriguing and fun.

There are a number of story arcs going on. The two main arcs focus on the death of Lily half a century ago and the death of Isabel shortly after Meg arrives on the campus. These two deaths are parallels in many ways, so much so that it's a little too uncanny, but it sets Meg onto the trail of discovering the truth of both deaths. In addition to these two main plots, there is a lot of character interaction and growth between mother and daughter. Meg is trying to stay focused on her teaching, finishing her PhD, and investigating these deaths, but at the same time she's trying to grow a stronger relationship with her daughter Sally who has been struggling since Meg's husband died. The interactions between teenage daughter and busy mother felt realistic. Since we are generally seeing the world only through Meg's eyes, we never get Sally's reaction to what's going on except through the lens of the concerned parent trying hard to make things work but confused and frustrated at the lack of connection. I really felt that the relationship between these two was one of the strengths of this book.

The other big strength was the backstory of Lily, Vera and Nash (the man who came between them). The romance between these characters was told with the almost poetic language used elsewhere in the book. The love was very beautiful and sentimental and helped draw me in to the plot. When this historical plot collides with the "present day" plot, I felt like the mingling and unraveling of the various tangles was a little contrived, but generally, the stories were interesting and engaging.

The book had a sort of creepy fairy tale quality that worked as a sort wrapping for the entire text (especially poignant since Meg was doing her PhD on fairy tales). The writing is crisp and lovely though sometimes slowed down the reading and even though it was pretty it lessened my engagement in the story. Still, I was interested and excited to see the various plots work to their conclusion. Personally, I felt like the climactic conclusion was a little too "Scooby-Doo-esque" and I wonder if that segment could have been handled differently. But in the end, I liked the way the story wrapped up.

While I didn't necessarily "love" this book, I attribute part of that to it being on the edges of my "normal" reading tastes. However, I enjoyed it enough that I'd actually like to seek out more by this author.

3 out of 5 stars

Kari says

DNF at 25% boring

melissa11br says

Things I Liked:

The atmosphere of the book was perfect. It was creepy and fairy tale-esque and kept reminding me of how gorgeous and mysterious nature can be. I loved the aspects of the school's history that related to fairy tales and the mysterious veil that was spread across the whole place. The story was pretty intriguing as well, near the end. But what I think carries this book is the setting and the descriptions of the time, the location, etc, that make you feel like you are a part of this forgotten little corner of the world. Goodman has a wonderful ability to create setting.

Things I Didn't Like:

I admit that, while the story did suck me in, the ending I found just a little too unbelievable. I was struck with how convenient, how over the top, almost melodramatic it became. I had a hard time buying into some of the revelations near the end and especially the motivations. Still, an interesting and absorbing book.

Full review at [One Librarian's Book Reviews](#).

Alissa Patrick says

2.5 Stars.

This was a misfire for me. I don't know if maybe reading it would be better, instead of listening to it like I did.

There were just too many characters and too much confusion, and when the secrets of the old boarding school and its surrounding forest were revealed, my reaction was this:

Blair says

The one other book I've read by this author, *The Lake of Dead Languages*, was excellent, and is amongst my favourite reads of this year so far. It was a disappointment, then, to find this one so formulaic and uninspired in comparison. It was a good story and certainly the kind of thing I generally enjoy - the problem, for me, was that it was so similar to *The Lake of Dead Languages*.

The protagonist and narrator is the single mother of an only daughter and, at the start of the book, has moved from the city to take a teaching job in an isolated, old-fashioned, self-contained and seemingly idyllic boarding school. There's an old, presumed lost, journal revealing secrets from the past, and students disappearing and dying in mysterious circumstances, possibly related to the practise of pagan rites and rituals. One of the teachers isn't what they seem to be, and there are a lot of secrets regarding parentage and characters suddenly finding out they're actually someone else's daughter. And the narrator embarks on a romance with a rugged local police officer.

This is a description of the plot of *Arcadia Falls*; it's also a description of the plot of *The Lake of Dead Languages*. And the latter was written in 2002, while this one was published this year. It feels as though the

author is just going through the motions and rehashing a previously used plot; the two are remarkably similar and this really inhibited my enjoyment of the book. I don't know whether I was perhaps just unlucky in picking the one title that is very like the one I've already read, or whether all Goodman's novels are variations on the same theme. I still have another book of hers, *The Ghost Orchid*, in my to-read pile (the result of an Amazon recommendations-based spree), so I suppose I'll find out when I get round to reading that.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in February 2012.

There is almost a subgenre of fiction set in remote New England boarding schools and colleges. Like thirties house parties in English stately homes, a staple setting for vintage crime fiction (as well as P.G. Wodehouse, of course), they provide a sealed community of privileged individuals which acts to intensify relationships, promote jealousy and passion, and makes more or less normal people behave in strange and bizarre fashions - as happens, for instance, in Donna Tartt's *The Secret History*, referenced in a review quoted on the cover of this edition of *Arcadia Falls*.

The specific location for this story is school focusing on art, formerly an artistic colony. It is told from the point of view of a recently widowed (and, as a result, newly poor) single mother Megan Rosenthal, who gratefully takes up a post teaching English literature at Arcadia Falls, which is accompanied by the offer of a place at the school to her daughter Sally, only to find that within a few weeks of her arrival and the start of the school year a student goes missing before her body is found at the foot of cliffs in the (extensive) school grounds. At the same time, Megan becomes fascinated by the relationship between the two women who effectively founded and then ran the school for decades with a somewhat peculiar vision (which includes participation in pagan rituals to mark the seasons by the pupils).

A "finding oneself" theme is very important in *Arcadia Falls*, exemplified by a children's story, *The Changeling Girl*, written by one of the school's founders which is told, retold, reflected and commented on throughout the novel in ironic fashion, as characters both act it out and talk about it - adopted children discovering or seeking the identities of their parents, for example, as well as Megan trying to build a new life for herself and Sally after the death of her husband. Another theme is the way that the decisions made in one generation affect the next, with several mothers giving up careers to raise children, or giving up a baby for adoption, with repercussions for both the parents and the children. Sometimes the treatment is a little mawkish, but generally these themes serve to unify the disparate elements of the story and even provide something of a moral, if the reader feels that such a thing is necessary.

Though the setting with its Gothic touches and the themes of *Arcadia Falls* are hardly original, it is a well written and entertaining novel on the boundary between literary fiction, crime fiction, and fantasy, the last being more suggested than the other two genres. It is the depiction of character and the touches of atmosphere which make the story worth reading. It reminded me of the novels of Mary Stewart, particularly the later ones. (view spoiler)
