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From Debut Novelist David Klein – A Page-Turning Story of Suburbia and Its Secrets

Gwen Raine is a woman readers will instantly recognize: an attractive, thirtyish stay-at-home mom who lives in the kind of tranquil suburban community where the wives spend their days ferrying the kids to and from school and music lessons and nature camps and where the husbands work long, grueling hours at stressful white-collar jobs in order to maintain the upscale standard of living to which the whole family has become all-too-accustomed. It's a milieu in which everything seems to be right—yet so much can go wrong.

And it does—starting with a seemingly minor decision that turns Gwen's perfect life upside down. It's a typical Friday morning in late summer and Gwen is anticipating a long-awaited weekend away at the lake with her overworked husband, Brian, and their two small children. After dropping her daughter off at swim class, Gwen drives across town to purchase a small bag of marijuana from an old flame. She's counting on the pot to help her unwind later that night in those precious private moments with Brian after the kids are asleep. Then, on the way home, Gwen gets into a car accident—an accident that leaves her bruised and somewhat battered but leaves the other driver (an elderly man who crossed over into her lane) dead. The local police know the accident isn't her fault, but when they find the marijuana in Gwen's car, they throw the book at her. There have been problems with drugs in the schools and they want to crack down on abusers, whoever and wherever they are. Before long, Gwen is in legal hot water—and the temperature keeps rising. Finally, under pressure from the police, her attorney, and her own husband, she reveals her source's name.

Meanwhile, Brian is embroiled in a moral and legal dilemma of his own when the big pharmaceutical company he works for markets an anti-anxiety drug for "off-label" use as a weight-loss aid, only to discover that it can have deadly consequences. And Gwen's former lover Jude, a local restaurateur and the supplier of the stash of the title, has gotten in way over his head with his little side business.

Told from multiple perspectives and revolving around a diverse set of vividly imagined characters, this rich, ambitious, and deeply satisfying novel takes a mordant look at our society's ambivalent and often hypocritical attitude toward all manner of mood-altering substances, legal and illegal. Paced by psychological suspense and an ever-thickening plot, *Stash* ultimately is about the moral complications that arise when a modern woman's fierce determination to do the right thing collides head-on with human fallibility and desire.

Stash Details

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From Reader Review Stash for online ebook

switterbug (Betsey) says

Debut novelist Klein has written a smart and nervy domestic drama/thriller. The pages fly, and the prose is crisp and economical. He tackles difficult, dicey, and controversial subject matter without handing out platitudes or falling into blunt party line agendas. I am tempted to call it a non-puff beach read. It is lively, energetic, and easily accessible, but it is also thought provoking and ultimately bold.

Loving mother and housewife Gwen Raine bought some pot from ex-boyfriend Jude for recreational use. On the way home, driving down some precarious mountain roads, she was involved in a car accident. She was hit by an elderly driver (suffering from dementia), and both end up in the ER. Although Gwen was not at fault, the police found the bag in her car and the THC in her system, and now the DA is poised to strong-arm or throw the book at her due to escalating drug sales in the community.

Concurrently, husband Brian is having some problems at his high-paying job at Caladon Pharmaceuticals. They have been walking a fine line with marketing an anti-anxiety medication as an off-label weight loss drug. Some speculative and hazardous risks were taken by the company's executives, which threaten to topple over onto Brian. The Raines have separate stressors and two small children together. The marriage is now loaded with accumulating anxieties and legal problems. How--or if--they pull through keeps the reader on edge.

Told from multiple narrative perspectives in alternating chapters, the story focuses primarily on Gwen and Brian Raine; the enigmatic and laconic Jude; and Jude's daughter, Dana. Gwen and Brian's depiction as a suburban married couple devoted to their children do fall into a quasi-stock profile. The "form" of their characters is familiar. However, Klein keeps the story taut and the reader tense by compounding the problems resulting from a ripple effect that connects the characters to each other. He convincingly pushes the envelope with Gwen. She is faced with difficult ethical and moral choices, and her responses aren't canned or predictable.

Jude is morally ambiguous, and I applaud the author for an honest and organic rendering of this character, never falling into an easy trap of stereotype. Moreover, Klein doesn't demonize all recreational pot smokers into categorical addicts or amoral/immoral deviants. He aptly illustrates the various lifestyle choices that people make and the consequences of their behaviors.

The author did his research and applied his details fluently. I worked for a company that performed drug trials, and I recognize the spot-on ethical dilemmas and vicissitudes that were portrayed and plagued Brian.

The denouement was tidy on one front, luridly messy on another. Klein doesn't tarnish it by creating a sea change in his characters or laying on a heavy-handed, disingenuous morality. The final and anticlimactic scene was authentic and arch, and I admire the author for his audacious and honest story. It is sure to create animated discussions, which makes it an excellent selection for broad-minded book club readers.

Colleen Turner says

I received this book as an ARC copy from goodreads.com.

Gwen Raine is your average upper/middle class stay-at-home suburban mom. She takes the kids to after school activities, is on the PTA board and cooks her family healthy organic food. She has two smart, well-adjusted children and a loving and hard working husband. She also likes to smoke pot to relax and unwind. When she buys a bag from an old flame for her and her husband to enjoy on an upcoming trip to their lake house, she has no idea how that decision will have everlasting consequences. What could a little pot do?

First of all, the man she bought the pot from has unresolved feelings for Gwen. While he tries to unravel those feelings and decipher if Gwen might have feelings for him as well, he is also trying to expand his drug trade in order to make a large amount of money quickly in order to pay for his daughter's expensive college and retire early. But could going large also be more dangerous than he can handle?

After Gwen smokes a small amount of her stash she drives to pick up her kids from summer camp. On her way an elderly man plows into Gwen's car, injuring her and killing himself. The police find the pot in her car and arrest her for DUI. Even though she is not at fault, Gwen continues to feel she might have been able to do something to change the outcome if she had been smoking. While she is released, the police imply they must crack down hard on Gwen as there have been a lot of drug issues in their nice, upscale community that must be stopped. If Gwen gives up her supplier, they might let her charges dropped. But how can she give up her friend when he did her a favor and trusted her to keep his secret?

During this time, Gwen's husband Brian is facing trouble at work. He works in the marketing side of a drug company who has been promoting their anxiety drug off label as a weight loss drug as well. They are walking a fine line of morality that just might dissolve when patients who have been prescribed the drug for weight loss display signs of anorexia. Should they bring this news to the forefront and discontinue using the drug for weight loss, or try to continue as before?

This book brings up a lot of valid questions and issues that we as a society don't like to dwell on in our see-no-evil world. Should a mom be smoking pot at all, even if it doesn't seem to affect her life at large? Is selling drugs ever justifiable and can a good person be a drug dealer? Is it right for the police to do whatever they feel is right for the greater good? Where is the line of morality for big drug companies?

I really enjoyed this book. I could relate to Gwen in many ways, although I found her to be slightly vapid and could not believe some of the choices she continued to make. Even though I could not agree with Brian, her supplier, by the author adding his daughter into the storyline you feel his need to protect her even if it is at the expense of his integrity. This story opens the shutters of the middle class to display some of the dirty secrets lurking inside. The book points out, to me, that everyone, no matter who you are, has their secrets. What are yours?

Susan says

I was nervous after reading the summary, knowing the story would be "told from multiple perspectives." I think I expected a vanilla, Picoult-esque narrative, and I'm so glad I was wrong. The different perspectives are actually all in the 3rd person. The novel is still mostly fluff and cheese, and not the type of thing I would usually read, but I'm gonna give Klein props because this could've turned out disastrous and it was actually pretty entertaining. There were a number of flaws, the first being that it was a lot longer than necessary. A lot of the detail that he goes into about the technical side of the drugs and the marketing were unnecessary and I

wish it'd been trimmed down. The prose was mostly well-written, but at random times, especially in the last half, would become quite sloppy, like the narrator was half inside the characters head and half outside it, the tone sounding incomplete and unpolished. At first, I thought there were way too many characters, but he managed to bring it all together in the end, proving me wrong. Also, almost all of the characters were fleshed-out and 3-dimensional.

Of course, someone had to die in the end as they do in just about every novel or film about the "dark side of suburbia." (American Beauty, The Ice Storm, Lawn Dogs, etc. I can't remember if someone dies in Little Children or not.) I was hoping it would be Gwen or Dana as that certainly would've been more shocking, but I suppose he went with the more realistic choice and that's fine. The ending was quite funny although I'm not sure I liked it. I'd like to think Gwen would stay out of it this time, but it's difficult to say whether she's learned from her experience. One reason I liked the book was because it didn't really try to take sides on the drug debate, and there were some interesting juxtapositions between recreational drug use, prescription drug use, etc. I also liked the juxtaposition of facial scars: Dana's birth defect and Aaron's military disfigurement, as well as Gwen's temporary scar from her car accident.

Grade: B+

Jill says

Debut author David Klein knows his stuff...or one might say, his stash. I was hooked from the opening chapter of this very assured first book, which abounds with highly authentic characters and morally ambiguous situations, tempered with psychological suspense. By the last page, I was a definite fan.

My advice to readers: ignore the publisher's lurid tagline "a page-turning story of suburbia and its secrets." This is a far more nuanced book that asks important questions: how far would you go to do the right thing? What is the right thing, anyway? And how do drugs permeate our society? There are no "pat" answers; Klein explores the moral dilemmas without sermonizing. That in itself is a relief.

The central character, Gwen Raine, is an attractive suburban mother who engages in recreational pot smoking. Through an unfortunate chain of events, she is involved in a car accident with an elderly driver who suffers from Alzheimer's; he is clearly at fault. Because of drug problems in the community, the cops intend to turn her into a scapegoat. They pressure her to give up her "source" – who just happens to be her old boyfriend, Jude.

At the same time, her husband Brian, the marketing director at a pharmaceutical company, is engaged in his own ethical dilemma: his anxiety-fighting drug, Zuprone, is being prescribed as an off-label treatment for weight loss. Unfortunately, several users are experiencing an undesirable side effect that the company wishes to quench.

The details that Klein uses are remarkably accurate. He obviously has carefully researched the drug chain – fascinating reading in itself. As a marketing person, I recognized the ways that pharmaceuticals are promoted to target physicians.

And I particularly appreciated that Klein did not turn this into a simplistic "right or wrong" issue; he explores the ethical ambiguities that lie at the heart of each issue. This is a well-plotted book with crisp dialogue, well-rendered characters, and thought-provoking themes. DEFINTELY recommended!

Heather says

Gwen Raines is a thirty-something housewife with a loving husband and two small children. One sunny afternoon, Gwen makes a pit stop while running errands to pick up a small bag of marijuana for an upcoming trip. On her way home, Gwen is involved in a serious accident that leaves an elderly gentleman dead, and she is questioned by the police. When they decide to perform a drug test on Gwen, her perfectly ordered life begins to take a hideous turn. Meanwhile, Gwen's husband Brian, who works in the marketing department of a pharmaceutical company, is having a moral and ethical quandary of his own. It seems that one of his company's new drugs is being marketed as an off-label weight loss aid, and recent studies have come to light that pose problems for Brian and his company. On the other side of town, Jude Gates, the old friend whom Gwen scored the bag of marijuana from, is dancing towards the edge. Jude, a restaurant owner and father of a teenage daughter, is getting himself deeper and deeper into a world of drug trafficking that puts both his safety and future at critical risk, and his time is running out. Taut with emotional highs and psychological suspense, *Stash* tells the story of a group of people trapped in the gray areas between right and wrong, and the decisions that they must make when they are backed against the wall.

I have to say that I loved this book! I was surprised at how gripping it was and how involved I became in the handful of moral conundrums it presented to me. The book started off rather sedately but quickly amped up and was rollicking along at a good clip by the end of the first section. There was a lot going on, with multiple levels of intrigue and suspense scattered throughout the careful and tenebrous plot.

The position Gwen got herself into at the beginning of the book is one I think many people will relate to and understand. Gwen is not a bad person or a criminal, yet she takes an unnecessary risk and all hell breaks loose on her. Gwen was easy to sympathize with. A stay-at-home mother and member of the PTA, she didn't expressly invite danger into her life; she only wanted to let her hair down and be able to smoke a bit while she was away on vacation. What happened to Gwen was terrifying because it could happen to anyone. Though her misdeed was slight, the repercussions were life changing and severe. Gwen's happy and ordered existence was left hanging by a thread, and she seemed to make a lot of unwise decisions once this happened.

The plight of Brian's ethical conflict was more restrained, and I felt, a little less successful. Brian had a responsibility to the community in the marketing of his new drug that he swept under the table and shrugged off, posing problems for not only his career but for the unwitting people who began taking his medicine for an off-label use. I liked Brian and found him resourceful and committed to both his work and his family but I didn't understand his decision to hide the things that he did regarding the drug and its uses. Once the seriousness of the problem came to light, Brian redirected himself into doing the right thing, and I was glad for him. Brian and Gwen were both dealing with the same type of problem, only in very different arenas, and through all of it, they remained a unit focused on the outcome, sometimes sacrificing their own morals in order to get to that particular outcome.

Through the book's focus on Jude things began to take a darker turn. He seemed like a moral and upstanding guy, but as I read about him I became aware that Jude was a very shady character. He had various sides to his personality and was a good father, but he erased a lot of that goodness through manipulation and throwing his weight in undesirable directions. The thing is, I liked Jude. I liked his charm and his edginess, and I wanted so much for him to do the right thing and make a clean break from this kind of life. I think Jude wanted that too but was swept away by greed and the kinds of relationships that it can be sticky to get out of. Jude had a good heart, but his perception of right and wrong was very skewed, and this kept me in turmoil

while reading about him. He was obviously a man with demons, but there existed in Jude a lot of benevolence and altruism. His was a case of a good man doing very bad things for a convincing reason, but that reason just wasn't convincing enough for me, so I was constantly at war with myself about my reactions to him.

This book presents a lot of tough questions for the reader to puzzle out for themselves. What happens when a good person does something illegal? What happens when this same action is done by someone with more sinister leanings? Is there really any distinction between the two? This book made me look at some familiar situations in a new way and made me wonder just what my friends and neighbors could be hiding behind closed doors. It made me wonder about the stringency of the law and the unintended repercussions that could take place when people try to creep over the edge of it. Mostly, it made me think about the unpredictability of life and the way that one action can change everything and leave you an outcast in the community that once respected and valued you.

Though I didn't expect it, this book really crept up on me and kept me avidly turning the pages until its explosive conclusion. It's really a much deeper story than I had first believed and has given me a lot of food for thought. It also started a lot of conversations in my house about the ideas that it so eloquently expresses. I think this book is a must for those who love psychological suspense novels as well as those who like quiet thrillers, and I am so glad to have gotten the chance to devour it. A complex and thought provoking read. Recommended.

David Klein says

Well, I wrote it. So five stars.

Nancy says

Gwen was the epitome of spoiled, well-to-do, wonderful home, children and husband. One small little habit - she and a few friends smoked pot. Oh, they weren't potheads, not even weekly use; but it was nice to have on a vacation. Gwen knew someone who "knew someone who...." you get the idea. All no hassle, no stress, just pick it up and have a lovely vacatin with your hard-working husband and family.

Except when the little old, dementia-fuddled man crossed the line and hit Gwen dead-on. His fault? No doubt there but, again, the small issue of a bag of pot beside her on the front seat. Where did she buy it? Give up the name and maybe she won't have charges pressed. Will she cave in?

Stash is a story of the past, the present with a hint of the future. When Gwen goes to buy marijuana from her ex-lover, ex-boss and much-farther-up-the-dope-chain-than-she could-ever-imagine, Jude; she starts into motion a series of events that will not only rock her world, but her entire universe. The players are many, the ending not totally expected and the wake of disaster left is one that no one will survive unscathed.

A fantastic first novel by David Klein. A tale that could happen to many and some of them may read this and learn. Most of them, unfortunately, won't.

William Bentrim says

Stash by David Klein

This a sobering look at how insipid decision making can change your life. A woman's indecisive behavior leads her into both legal and marital discord.

I found this book rather sobering with no pun intended. It seemed entirely too realistic. It is easy to see how a nostalgic longing for past excitement and a reaffirmation of sexual identity could lead to bad decisions. The scary part was that bad decisions don't need to be grotesquely bad but can mount incrementally to horrendous conclusions.

I admired Brian's spousal loyalty as I deplored his, all to common, work above all attitude. The book aptly illustrated the hard charging, must get ahead at all costs attitude of a surprising number of the 30 something generation. I found Gwen's lackadaisical attitude regarding personal responsibility and her over the top remorse for her thoughtless behavior a bit confusing but believable. People often continue bad behavior or flat out stupidity in spite of negative consequences, this is the hallmark of Gwen's behavior. The ironic aspects of Jude's role were well portrayed without being overly obvious.

I highly recommend the book.

Roxy says

Oh yes, this review WILL have spoilers. Before I get into it though I will say it was a good read. Quick and compelling while keeping the story simple, nothing too complex. The characters draw you in and I'm sure you will find yourself being stirred by the views or actions of one if not more of them. The attitudes and actions of one of the characters REALLY struck a nerve with me but not enough to make me stop reading. I really enjoyed this but and am VERY glad that I chose it for my book club so I can talk about it to others.

*****Start of area with Potential Spoilers*****

O...M....G! I found the main character, Gwen, so annoying! She was so naive and well, a freakin' moron! I could not believe the decisions she made and the fact that she thought she was doing the right thing for people other than herself!!

She says near the end of the book that one of her "codes" is taking responsibility for one's own actions. When did she do this during the whole story?!? She worried she did not react quickly enough in the car accident but she never thought "I should not have smoked that joint".

It takes her getting lost in the woods, like an idiot IMO, before she sort of admits that she may have been feeding into Jude's crush on her. But still she doesn't take responsibility for never actually shooting him

down. Jude hits the nail on the head when he reflects on their first relationship that she says 'yes' without having to actually say it or in other words, she never says no. She just sort of lets someone else decide for her.

Oh!! And the fact that she and Marlene have smoked up while home with the kids and then play with them while high!! O....M....G....and neither of them see something wrong with this?!?! I'm almost compelled to say that Jude is actually a better parent to Dana. He does everything he can to keep drugs away from her while Gwen smokes while hiding from her kids!

And everything between Gwen & Brian.....it was like a kid doing something wrong, getting busted, but bats her eyes and daddy and doesn't get in trouble. Just when you think Brian is really going to let her have it for making a stupid decision and an irresponsible mistake he thinks about how pretty she is or something over the top loving like that, melts and never scolds her for what she has done.

Gwen never understands or even thinks about the possible consequences of her actions and that really pissed me off!!

And the ending.....just proves to me that Gwen, and her friend Marlene, are MORONS! The kind of people who do not learn from experiences or just learn the thing that causes the least accountability to them. I can't stand people like that.

Eva Leger says

I'd have read this in less than one day if I had the time. I'm amazed that this is a first novel of Klein's and can say without a doubt that I'll snatch up his next book the day it comes out. How Klein managed to portray Gwen so realistically and beautifully I just don't know. That always amazes me.

This is a must read for any lover of realistic fiction. The entire plot couldn't be more realistic any way you look at it. I loved, loved, loved Gwen, Jude , Brian, Dana, all of them.

I can't say much because I hate spoilers and refuse to hide most of my reviews but poor, poor Jude. I think I loved him so much I blocked out what was happening. But I can't be upset because I love nothing more than a realistic ending. I definitely don't like when everything gets tied up nicely with a bow.

Great story! Can't wait for another like it!

Kathleen Kelly says

This first novel, Stash, by David Matthew Klein is a fast paced novel telling what happens when Gwen Raines, a stay at home mom, makes a descision that creates chaos for those around. Gwen buys a small amount of marijuana for use by her and a friend. It isn't so much buying the marijuana that creates the chaos but what happens after it is purchased. A fatal car accident results in the finding of this 'Stash" in Gwens car that creates the problems. Even though Gwen is found not responsible for the fatal accident it still causes problems. The detective for her case is bound and determined to see that Gwen pays for her lack of judgement. Her former boss and lover is her supplier and Gwen does not want to divulge to the police that Jude Gates is her supplier. Each chapter is in a different characters perspective, her husband Brian a

pharmaceutical executive who is facing ethical issues at work, her friend Marlene, whom she was sharing the pot with and Marlene's husband who is the lawyer the Raines hire for any charges that arise. Jude owns and operates a restaurant and has a daughter away at college who has no clue as to her father's 'sideline'. Gwen wants to do the right thing and in doing so causes her family and others to be put into danger. Some tense and emotional situations make for a very suspenseful and satisfying novel by a first time novelist. This fast paced story was a pleasurable read.

Brian says

2012 has begun on a very low reading note. This "thriller" is very slow paced and I could not get terribly invested in the characters. I made it about 250 pages in before deciding to flip to the end, therefore giving me enough vested interest to write this review. (I have many books that I start that I do not even write a review of). Gwen is a suburban mother married to Brian, who is a pharm. tech who is doing a trial of a drug that will make people lose weight. Gwen loves pot as well. She gets it from her dealer, Jude, who is an old flame. Then she smokes up and drives her car, striking and killing an old man with dementia. From there, the story doesn't really go anywhere for a long time. There are a lot of characters who are attempted to be built up. However, I didn't like any of them, and felt that they all were very selfish and not likeable.

Shannon says

Gwen Raines is a typical suburban, stay at home mom with a husband and 2 children. Her husband is a well-paid executive in a pharmaceutical company. One day, Gwen decides to buy some marijuana from an ex-boyfriend. After smoking a joint, she is called to pick up her kids and gets in a car accident on the way. When the police find the marijuana in her car, the police get involved and Gwen's life gets unexpectedly more complicated.

If there was a message in this book, it could be that doing drugs is acceptable, but selling drugs is BAD. Make sure you take into account how your drug usage will/can affect your children.

It worries me that the story didn't shock me. The author included so many details of my everyday life as a stay at home mom that the characters and situations were believable. I have not encountered drugs in our neighborhood, but I do not doubt that they exist. I definitely hope that the ending is not common in real life.

This was an enjoyable and quick read that didn't take me all that far from my home.

Sara (smb+jab) says

The novel has been described as "a page turning story of suburbia and its secrets" which is a dead on description of the novel by debut author, David Kline. Told from multiple characters perspective's Stash centers around the story of Gwen Rain, a thirty something mother of two who is happily married to Brian, a pharmaceutical marketing executive. Through the twists and turns of the plotline the pair is forced to face their own moral and ethical dilemmas as the story unfolds.

I was immediately drawn into the story and couldn't put the book down.

With the story being told from multiple perspectives the reader was given an in depth look into the character's minds and how the decisions they have made affected others. Additionally, the transition from the different character's perspectives was well written and flowed well together adding layers to the story. While Gwen is the major protagonist in the story, there are several secondary plotlines that are entangled with her story. Each of these secondary plot lines adds depth to the story, instead of drawing away the focus. Overall I really enjoyed this book and I am looking forward to reading more from David Klein.

Jessica at Book Sake says

This book was quick to hook me. Klein's writing style is very to the point and well edited. He removed anything that was meaningless and left you with everything you needed to be fully immersed in the character's lives. The story centers around the choices that we make in our daily lives and shows us just how many different choices there are. Some characters choose wisely, while others do foolish things, some learn from their mistakes and others do not.

The story causes you to remember to never assume that you are the only one out there with options to go one way or the other, life is not all about you but those that you care about as well. The life we choose effects those around us and it is shown clearly in this book time and time again. Each character that is focused on is so realistic that they could be a neighbor, your friend, your co-worker. Each situation is different, yet they are all pulled together by common threads. Often I find books that follow multiple characters a bit tedious or confusing, but I didn't once feel that when reading this book. Everyone was clearly defined as their own individual with their own story to weave into the plot.
