



Bonfire

Krysten Ritter

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Should you ever go back?

It has been ten years since Abby Williams left home and scrubbed away all visible evidence of her small town roots. Now working as an environmental lawyer in Chicago, she has a thriving career, a modern apartment, and her pick of meaningless one-night stands.

But when a new case takes her back home to Barrens, Indiana, the life Abby painstakingly created begins to crack. Tasked with investigating Optimal Plastics, the town's most high-profile company and economic heart, Abby begins to find strange connections to Barrens' biggest scandal from more than a decade ago involving the popular Kaycee Mitchell and her closest friends—just before Kaycee disappeared for good.

Abby knows the key to solving any case lies in the weak spots, the unanswered questions. But as Abby tries to find out what really happened to Kaycee, she unearths an even more disturbing secret—a ritual called “The Game,” which will threaten the reputations, and lives, of the community and risk exposing a darkness that may consume her.

With tantalizing twists, slow-burning suspense, and a remote, rural town of just five claustrophobic miles, *Bonfire* is a dark exploration of the question: can you ever outrun your past?

Bonfire Details

Date : Published November 7th 2017 by Three Rivers Press

ISBN :

Author : Krysten Ritter

Format : Kindle Edition 256 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Thriller, Mystery Thriller

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From Reader Review Bonfire for online ebook

Katie says

Such a fun debut novel! This premise of "the girl returning to her disturbing home town" has been done before, but I still found this incredibly unique. Review is up on my channel! Video review:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdvJn...>

Meredith says

Solid 3.5 stars

Bonfire is an addictive mystery about corporate greed and small town scandals.

After 10 years of living in anonymity in Chicago, environmental lawyer Abby Williams returns to her tiny hometown Barrens, Indiana to investigate Optimal Plastics, a corporation that not only fuels the town's economy, but also saturates Barrens with its philanthropic efforts. Residents of Barrens are getting sick, and Abby believes their illnesses are a result of water contamination caused by Optimal. Abby, who was tormented and bullied throughout high school is desperate to uncover the dirt on Optimal, as she believes the corporation is not only harming the residents of Barrens, but also led to the illness of childhood best friend and high school frenemy, Kaycee Mitchell.

Flashback 10 years ago: Kaycee Mitchell was the "It" girl at Barrens High School. She and her group of minions created "The Game," which worked to torment and bully their peers. Kaycee and her minions made Abby's life a living hell. When Kaycee begins getting sick, her illness "spreads" to her group of friends. Once Kaycee's friends admit their illness was a hoax, she goes missing never to be seen again.

Upon her return to Barrens, Abby must confront her teenage enemies, her high school crush, and her abusive father. Fueled by her obsession with Optimal and Kaycee, her behavior spirals out of control putting her in imminent danger.

Bonfire is a compulsive read that hooked me from the start. I loved the dark, snarky tone and felt like Ritter did a stellar job of fleshing out the town of Barrens. Abby is a strong, yet unreliable narrator. In the back of my head, I kept picturing her as Jessica Jones without superpowers! The mystery surrounding Kaycee drew me in. My only complaint is that the last ¾ unravels and becomes a bit convoluted. **Overall, this is an impressive debut by Krysten Ritter!**

I received a copy of this book from NetGalley and the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

Julie says

Bonfire by Krysten Ritter is a 2017 Crown Archetype publication.

A heavily atmospheric and absorbing crime story-

When environmental lawyer, Abby Williams returns to her hometown in Indiana to investigate illnesses which could be connected to the town's life force and largest employer, Optimal Plastics, she immediately, regrets coming back.

She soon learns her estranged father is quite ill, and she is flooded with childhood memories of her best friend, a girl named Kaycee, who may or may not have been exhibiting signs of illness, who has simply vanished into thin air, leaving Abby haunted and hollow, even after all these years.

She also experiences a strong wall of resistance from the town's residents, who are afraid she will uncover something about Optimal that will affect their livelihoods.

But, Abby is determined to learn the truth behind Kaycee's disappearance, and the possible cover up by Optimal, as well as a connection between a scholarship program the plant offers, catering to female applicants only.

Yet the deeper Abby digs, the more convinced she is that something very sinister is going on, but her work is heavily compromised by the spike in her alcohol consumption and her erratic behavior, which could get her kicked off the case.

Bonfire is a dark, moody, edgy novel of suspense, very engrossing, and convincing. The atmosphere is very heavy and thick, the foreboding palpable. A town willing to do almost anything, including sweeping evidence of scandal under the carpet, to save Optimal Plastic, sets up a tense and ugly tug of war for Abby, who is also being courted by a crowd of people that shunned her back in high school, while also receiving a few veiled threats.

Abby quickly becomes obsessed with Kaycee, believing she holds the key to unlocking the secrets the town is so desperate to protect.

Abby's narration is what makes the story work, in my opinion. She's cynical, yet harbors the scars of high school cruelty, which makes her susceptible to certain unrealized yearning that affects her decision making skills.

Although fragile emotionally, Abby is tenacious in her single minded pursuit. The story has a taut sense of urgency, which propels the reader forward, unable to look away as Abby's well -orchestrated professional life begins to circle the drain, along with her sanity.

Ritter did a fine job creating sympathetic characters, with a slow, but enticing plot, that reveals small town cover-ups and scandals wrapped around a timely subject, shining a spotlight on corporate power and greed, which really resonated with me. I got sucked into this story right away, finding it very hard a put down.

I am not a television fan, but my husband and I binged watched, 'Breaking Bad' a while back and loved it. But, I still did not connect Ritter to her acting credentials until I started writing this review.

Wow. I have to say I am impressed with this debut novel! This is a very solid crime novel and I hope it is not just a one off for the author. She has potential here and I hope she will capitalize on it fully.

Larry H says

Krysten Ritter rocks. Not only is she a total badass on *Jessica Jones*, and she rocked my world (and made me laugh out loud constantly) on her old television series *Don't Trust the B— in Apartment 23* (still bitter it was canceled), but now her debut novel, *Bonfire*, is a really good read. I hate overachievers...

Abby Williams couldn't get out of her Indiana hometown, Barrens, fast enough. Tormented by her childhood best friend Kaycee and her band of mean-girl minions, mistreated by her father, she fled the first chance she got, changed her accident and landed a job as an environmental lawyer in Chicago.

"I couldn't even explain it to myself. All I knew is that Barrens broke something inside of me. It warped the needles on my compass and turned the south to north and lies to truth and vice versa."

Ten years later, Abby's firm is investigating Optimal Plastics, the most high-profile company in Barrens, and the one that single-handedly rescued the town from all but certain elimination. The thought of going home again and facing her nemeses, including her father, is almost too much to bear, but she'll admit that the opportunity to enact a little revenge isn't totally unappealing. But it's not too long after she arrives back in Barrens that she realizes that the more things change the more they stay the same—or people want to pretend things have changed, even when they haven't.

As Abby and her colleagues try to make sense of whether Optimal is truly the town's savior or more of a danger, she finds herself unable to shake her memories of a scandal that Kaycee and her three friends were involved in all those years ago, a scandal which could possibly have ties to the problems with Optimal occurring today. She's desperate to find out what really happened to Kaycee, who allegedly disappeared all those years ago, and she is trying to decide whom she should trust—if anyone.

To uncover the truth, Abby must reopen doors that people want to remain closed, and that includes coming to terms with her father as well. She finds a web of blackmail, corruption, trading sexual favors, and lie upon lie. Her job and her mental state, perhaps even her life, are at stake.

I'm always a little bit dubious when a celebrity writes a novel. Sure, there are talented writers among them, but for every Carrie Fisher and Ethan Hawke comes a James Franco or Joan Collins. Ritter has a natural voice as a storyteller, and the book quickly hooks you and doesn't let you go, even as you may see how things will play themselves out. She is particularly impressive with her imagery as well as her descriptions of emotions, and what it's like to return home to a place where you never felt comfortable anyway.

It's not a perfect debut—she falls into the trap that so many action and crime movies do, where the villain gives a long, dramatic speech justifying why they were so hell-bent on destroying everything. (See Michael Shannon in *Man of Steel* for one.) But while that is a little annoying, I found *Bonfire* a really compelling read, one I devoured pretty quickly and enjoyed quite a bit. I'll definitely be looking out for Ritter's next book at some point.

Okay, Krysten...now how about a *Don't Trust the...* reunion?

NetGalley and Crown Publishing provided me an advance copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo....>

Carol (Bookaria) says

This book exceeded my expectations!

I've known the author Krysten Ritter from her work in the TV series *Breaking Bad* and *Jessica Jones*. So when I learned she had written a book I felt a little skeptical at first, but I am glad I put those thoughts aside and jumped into this novel.

Abby Williams is an environmental lawyer that returns to her childhood town to investigate the area's most important company: *Optimal Plastics*. There have been claims in the past of wrong-doing by that business and Abby is determined to find out if these claims are true.

During her stay, Abby is also interested in finding out if the disappearance of Kaycee Mitchell 10 years ago is related to *Optimal Plastics* or related to darker secrets long buried.

In her search for evidence, **Abby must face the people and memories she left behind**. The story is told from the point of view of the main character and is set in the small town of Barrens, Indiana.

Overall, **I enjoyed the novel** and recommend it to readers of mysteries, thrillers, and contemporary fiction.

Adam Silvera says

Yes, Krysten Ritter is the star of Netflix's JESSICA JONES, but this thriller is damn good independent of its celebrity author. It's addicting and gritty and fast-paced. Hope you get obsessed too!

Paromjit says

This is an atmosphere drenched and compelling crime debut from Krysten Ritter set in Barrens, a small town in Indiana. As children, Abby Williams and Kaycee Mitchell were best friends, only for Kaycee to turn on Abby with her coterie of friends at school. Hating her father and her miserable life, Abby is the one that got away. She lives in Chicago and is an environmental lawyer, returning to Barrens after a decade away, to investigate Optimal Plastics, a corporation that singlehandedly saved Barrens from economic and social devastation. It funds a number of social enterprises, provides scholarships and employment, and is at the heart of the community, with the majority of the town fiercely loyal to the company. Optimal is, however, dogged by rumours of corruption, contaminating the water supply and more. Abby may have moved away from Barrens, but Barrens and its secrets have never left her. This time she wants answers to the past, only to

find that the past looms large in the present.

Abby arrives in Barren with a group that includes her best friend, Joe, a black gay lawyer, setting up office on the Gallagher farm. They find a community hostile to their presence and the threat they represent. Two complainants drop their claims, but they continue to probe. Abby finds herself confronted by ghosts from the past, from the meanest girl, Mischa, who is now Vice Principal at Barren High School to her father who is a shadow of his former self. Haunted by Kaycee, a talented painter, telling her that problem is not that she cannot draw but that she does not see, Abby is convinced there is a connection with Kaycee and their current investigation into Optimal. Kaycee was popular, a born liar, poisoned Abby's dog, involved in the deplorable Game and blackmail, and apparently pretended to be sick with her friends to scam payments from Optimal and left Barrens soon after. However, Abby had seen Kaycee coughing up blood and displaying other worrying symptoms, and knows Kaycee was sick. Abby strikes up a relationship with Condor and Brent, and finds her drinking is spiralling out of control, all too aware that she is drawn to things that hurt the most. As all those close to her abandon her, questioning her conviction that the past and Kaycee is relevant and connected to Optimal, Abby finds her sanity is on the line as the past threatens to bury her.

Krysten Ritter has written a gripping and beautifully written crime debut. It is tense and suspenseful, drawing in the reader with ease. The greatest strengths of the book lie in the complex character creation and development of Abby, a woman who wants to come to terms with the past so that she can be alive in the present. Ritter presents a picture of a woman paying a heavy price as she gets closer to the truth, no-one believes her, yet despite her life disintegrating around her, she clings on with a tenuous grip with determination. She wants to do right by her childhood friend, Kaycee, even though Kaycee is a less than admirable character. The portrayal of Barren and its community is done remarkably well. I loved this brilliant book and whilst it does have its flaws, I recommend it highly. Many thanks to Random House Cornerstone for an ARC.

Maxwell says

This was a really strong debut and one of the better mystery/thrillers I've read in a while. Of course it had it's issues, though they were small and mostly due to editing in my opinion (the infamous "I released a breath I didn't realize I was holding" was used 3 times in the first half of the book...). Otherwise I found the characters to be strong, especially Abby our MC who is returning home to confront her past and a possibly corrupt corporation who is funding much of the small town she's from. The blending of past and present was seamless and really added a depth to the story that gave her justification for her actions and explanation for everything going on. It didn't feel forced or convenient like a lot of thrillers do. I'll be looking forward to what Ritter writes next! This one's definitely worth checking out.

Tan Markovic says

Reviews can be found at: www.booknerdtan.wordpress.com

I was sooo excited when I found out Krysten Ritter was releasing a debut novel especially in one of my favourite genres. I am obsessed with her as Jessica Jones and loved the role she played in Breaking Bad.

Shit, I loved this book. Ritter created such a dark, eerie atmosphere throughout, the plot is very fast paced

and the characters from her new and past life are introduced thick and fast. I'm sucker for this type of format ever since I read Gillian Flynn's *Sharp Objects* – girl leaves town that fucked her up, girl becomes successful detective (or in this case lawyer), girl returns to town full of crime and secrets that need solving. It was so easy to work out who the bad guys were early on which was a bit of a shame, however it didn't affect the story for me all that much, it was still very engaging and I enjoyed the story a great deal.

The only real annoyance I had with this novel was the fact there was a few speculations thrown out throughout, obviously to catch us out whilst reading, however, there were a fair few left unexplained and not blended into the story and it felt a bit obvious that red herrings were just being thrown whenever. It also a shame we never got much of Abby's life in Chicago – and how did she end up getting there?

Definitely recommend this to anyone who loves thrillers/mystery and I can't wait for Ritter's future novels!

Matthew says

Impressive debut for Ritter! When you see a famous person crossing over into a medium they are not known for, you worry it could be cringe-worthy or a total disaster. But, she does a pretty good job jumping right into the middle of the mystery/thriller genre and does a lot better than some more famous books (I am looking at you *The Girl on the Train*).

Now, all that being said, if this was the 10th book from a well-established author, some might not be quite as impressed. There are a few clichéd tropes that felt a little forced and some coincidences to move the story along. I go back my defense of this being her first effort. When you think of it that way, it is not too distracting. I would probably do the same thing if I ever write a book!

I have no problem recommending this book to anyone who likes a good thriller. Also, I hear that one of Ritter's goals is to write, and encourage others to write, stories with strong female leads. So, if you like female leads, this is for you!

Side note: The book takes place in Indiana. I live in Indiana. It is not too big of a deal, but I am not sure how much Ritter familiarized herself with the geography of the state before writing. At one point, the main character talks about her home town being on her way between Chicago and New York (Northern Indiana). Then she mentions being in Southern Indiana. Then she talks about it being near I-70 – if a town is on I-70 it is either in Western, Central, or Eastern Indiana. So, yeah, if you are not from the state it probably doesn't matter – but I was a little confused!

Emily May says

Going into this book, I had no idea who Krysten Ritter was. It was only when I went to the Goodreads page just now that I realized she's an actress. So I had approached this as I would any hyped thriller with an enticingly fiery cover. Unfortunately, though, I found *Bonfire* to have a **recycled plot** that lacked a certain juicy nastiness I like in my thrillers.

And isn't this a story we've seen a thousand times?

Maybe it's just me, but I feel like I've read countless versions of a woman escaping her smalltown life, only to grow up and become a detective or lawyer or whatever and return to solve a mystery and face all the people and unresolved issues of her past. I even think I've read a bunch of romance variations on this plot, too. It reminds me a little of *Sharp Objects*, but Ritter is no Gillian Flynn.

I felt like Ritter was trying to capture the "evil teen girls" vibe that so many authors want to tap into. The protagonist - Abby Williams - has a lot of personal demons and they're mostly related to the bullying she endured during her schooldays. Though I think this intense world of teenage girlhood has been explored much better by other authors, from Megan Abbott to Abigail Haas.

Bonfire sees Abby, now an environmental lawyer, returning to her hometown and hoping to uncover the truth about Optimal, a plastics corporation. Abby believes Optimal has been polluting the town's water supply and caused a string of unexplained illnesses among her classmates years ago. One of whom disappeared. The classmates in question claimed it was a harmless prank, but Abby's convinced otherwise.

I completely appreciate the importance of environmental pollution issues but I've got to say-- it's a bit of a hard sell as a compelling thriller. I only recall Paolo Bacigalupi doing it successfully. There was just never a moment when the book took hold of me and made me desperate to know the answers.

It was also just very unconvincing overall. I couldn't understand why Abby was so adamant that the pollution took place when even those who got sick claimed it wasn't true. It's not a spoiler to state the obvious - there *is* something more going on, but I don't know why Abby would think that. And Bonfire relies heavily on Abby conveniently remembering, forgetting, or deducing (quite incredibly) as needed. Abby makes many tenuous connections between some clue - that fell into her lap - and the truth, whilst jumping to conclusions that I doubt anyone would have made.

Also thought it was strange how Abby quickly developed TWO romantic relationships with the men of Barrens, but it didn't have any impact on the story whatsoever.

There is a moment at the climax of the novel which is easily the most thrilling of the whole book, and it was my favourite part, but **the culprit will come as a surprise to few**. They were so obviously shady that I had almost convinced myself they were a glaring red herring.

The climax leads into an extremely rushed ending-- we discover the villain, witness a face-off, and wrap it all up in the last fifteen pages of the book. Messy and disappointing.

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Brenda - Traveling Sister says

I was lost in the weedy and woody murky coulee with two of my Traveling Sisters as we read *Bonfire*. We started off intrigued by this story but soon became weighted down with a little too much drama and the dirty not-so-little secrets to this story. We became mentally exhausted and annoyed from it all and we just wanted to close our books and find a nice grassy spot to have a nap. However, our main character Abby was quite loud in our heads with the wild and annoying ways that she spun us down to some murky and lonesome

places along with her from our peaceful coulee.

Even though this one didn't quite work for some of us, it did take a turn that did catch my attention and had me raising my head from the murk and weeds and turning the pages to find out how it ended. I ended up in a spot in the coulee satisfied with this story.

Traveling Sisters Review also can be found on our sister blog:

<https://twogirlslostinacouleereading....>

Diane S ? says

3.5 Back home to Indiana, is the last place Abby wants to go, a place where she was bullied daily. Now an environmental lawyer in Chicago, she is a confident, more centered person. When a case in her old hometown sends her and her team back to investigate a company that seems to have the town in it's pockets, she is sure she can handle it. But can she?

Two different ratings for each half of the book. Very encouraging start, well written, seemed to have more substance than some other books in this genre. Nice mix of personal remembrances, traumas, with some interesting legwork on the investigation. Of course, all her ghosts come back to haunt her, unfinished business, old acquaintances who were not friends but now seem to want to be, and a mystery, a girl who had supposedly left town, a girl who had once been her friend. This part of the story garnered a four.

Then the second part of the story, was disappointed, not in the resolution of the plot, but in the way the main character her acted. Descended into a bad melodrama so different from the controlled writing and personality exhibited in the first half. Found it jarring and not totally believable, too, too much happened, thought it was unrealistic. So the second half I would rate a three. Hence my 3.5 rating.

So for me this was an unbalanced read. Was interesting, good, a little different but could have been better without the exploding second half. IMO

ARC from Netgalley.

Skyler Autumn says

2 Stars

The dialogue is cheesy and people speak in metaphors, there's way too many subplots, conclusions are fast and abrupt being pulled from thin air, the protagonist has a weird gifted memory that can remember every childhood conversation down to the smallest detail (what is she; magic?) and everyday basic interaction seems to leave our sloppy unlikable protagonist breathless, like really? You feel the air has been knocked out

of you again!! I'm starting to think our leading lady feels too much.

This book is a choppy, repetitive mess to say the absolute least (where's the editor at?). Hey I like Jessica Jones just as much as the next gal but if you take off the fanbase blinders for a second you will realize this book can't hold a candle to even the most mediocre of Thriller novels.

Review to Come.

megs_bookrack says

I really enjoyed this and would give it between a 4 and 4.5 ?s. I was introduced to this book through Book of the Month Club (which, if you aren't a member of, you should be) - although I didn't select it in the month it was first offered, I ultimately got it in a later box after seeing it everywhere!

This is the debut novel for Krysten Ritter, most well known as Jessica Jones in the Netflix original series of the same name. I was skeptical going in, I will admit - that whole singers becoming actors, actors becoming writers thing...but was so pleasantly surprised with how engaging this book was. The story follows our MC, Abigail Williams, who is an environmental attorney in Chicago. Having 'escaped', quite literally it seems, her small hometown in a very rural area, she gets the chance to return in order to investigate Optimal Plastics, the largest employer in town. Once there, Abby is thrown back into her old life and memories arrive that lead her to start questioning events that occurred when she was still in high school. Through memories of the past and current events a vicious tale of corruption and betrayal is told. The pace of this book is excellent and I just flew through it. Due to the short length of the chapters it is definitely a book that has that, 'just one more chapter...just one more chapter...' way about it!

The format of the book itself is pretty standard mystery/thriller which reminded me a bit of John Grisham's, The Rainmaker. There is nothing really groundbreaking or out of the ordinary about this book but it is very fun and overall, very strong storytelling IMO. I think this would be a great book to bring on vacation or to the beach. I hope Ms. Ritter keeps writing because I have a feeling her writing will mature and her books will continue to get stronger and stronger.

My only issue with the book, and it is a slight one, was that the ending felt a bit rushed. Personally, I think this could have been 20 to 40 pages longer in order to better explore the outcome of events that Abby reveals - both past and present. I would recommend this to anyone who enjoys legal thrillers, particularly with an evil corporation twist!
