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Belinda Bauer

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'Call your mother.'

'What do I say?'

'Say goodbye.'

This is how it begins.

Lone women terrorised and their helpless families forced to watch - in a sick game where only one player knows the rules. And when those rules change, the new game is Murder.

Living with her parents in the dank beach community of Limeburn, ten-year-old Ruby Trick has her own fears. Bullies on the school bus, the forest crowding her house into the sea, and the threat of divorce.

Helping her Daddy to catch the killer might be the key to keeping him close.

As long as the killer doesn't catch her first...

The Facts of Life and Death Details

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Author : Belinda Bauer

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From Reader Review The Facts of Life and Death for online ebook

Richard says

This is another wonderful story from the pen of Belinda Bauer.

Set, a little along the coast from Clovelly, in Limeburn a tiny village that once had a prosperous past, but never a pull for tourists to save its own economy. Slowly, the population and their homes seem to be surrendering to the economic reality, further squeezed by the advancing sea and the encroaching countryside. The hamlet has just 5 children who are forced to play together, one of whom is Ruby Trick. This is her story, during a changing time as she moves from small child into a young girl on the cusp of puberty. However, it is a wider threat to the whole of North Devon that will change her life forever and take her more rapidly into the world of adulthood. A serial killer is at work; no young woman appears safe and Ruby is determined to help her Daddy try to catch the murderer.

The author has always to my great pleasure shown great skills in voicing young people and writing from a child's perspective. That strength is demonstrated here with compassion and wit, through Ruby's coming of age, in her relationships at home, at school and as a new appointed deputy in her Dad's gunslingers' posse. Her relationship with her Father is crucial to this story and is beautifully explored, especially in their dialogue and interactions.

The sense of place is also beautifully drawn. I had visions of the author bribing local Welsh fisher folk to cross the Bristol Channel in secret to spy/research the geography and gather a sense of time and place. My partner suggested she probably used the Severn Bridge a couple of times. Whatever, Belinda Bauer has captured the locale and written so well that you can smell the sea, sense the damp and have to pause for breath as you climb one of the paths out of Limeburn.

This is an easy book to read and you can quickly progress through the book on the back of this discerning storyteller.

As with all her books, this novel has a dark side. The author's most clever attribute is her ability to look at stories from a fresh perspective. Here it is through the eyes of Ruby; the horrors of these crimes will change her life forever and live long for the reader long after you finish this excellent novel.

Maxine (Booklover Catlady) says

4.5 stars. Another piece of writing brilliance from Belinda Bauer! I just love the tension and atmosphere in her novels. This book is set in a seaside town in Devon, England. It should be a safe, quiet and happy place but something is going horribly wrong, women are dying, being murdered and the local police struggle to know what's going on. From the first murder scene you know this one will have you up reading because you too will want to know who did it.

It's told from the perspective of ten year old Ruby, who dreams of owning her own pony one day. The book is excellent in that it really showcases how tricky it can be for a writer to see and then portray things from a child's perspective. Bauer does it exceptionally well. I loved Ruby for a million reasons.

As the plot rolled out I was turning pages rapidly, I just wanted more. There were dark moments, funny moments and emotional moments too, Bauer is genius in putting that combination in her books and pulling it off well. As the police search for answers, Ruby is on her own journey and we go on it with her.

There are moments in this book where if you are a parent, a mother you will just simply hold your breath. A brilliant atmospheric crime novel that builds up to an outstanding finale.

The book has great characters, very easy to picture what's going on as you read, it has pace, thrills, scary moments, moments where you might hold your breath, revelation moments and is simply a cracking good read. I'm a huge Bauer fan, not one of her books has let me down yet. Read it, love it.

Lady Delacour says

Simple minded, unusual characters,
living dysfunctional lives...
while a murderer is in there mist.
Ok narration by Colleen Prendergast.

Tim The Enchanter says

Posted to The Literary Lawyer.ca

Gold Gavel for Best Novel of 2014

My #5 Read of 2014

An All Round Dazzling Thriller - 5 Stars

I feel a bit like I have hit the jackpot. I was first introduced to Belinda Bauer earlier this year in her delightfully odd novel, Rubbernecker . She followed up that effort with this equally delightful offering. Belinda Bauer displays a keen eye for detail and atmosphere and for the plucky, odd and charming child character. It was an all-round great read.

Plot summary

The majority of the story is told through the eyes of 10 year old Ruby Trick. She is a bit overweight, a tad socially awkward and she loves horses, mars bars, and her father. When her town faces a series of murders in which the victims are forced to call home and tell their mothers they are going to die, Ruby knows she has to help her daddy and his "posse" of wannabe cowboys help solve the crime. As the crime and the killer comes into focus she learns about love, family, pain and maturity and it all comes together in one of the most dramatic and exciting finishes I have read in any book all year.

My Thoughts

Like an Artist

The story is wonderfully atmospheric. You feel the dampness of the ocean mists, hear the rustling of the forest leaves and smell the moss covering the rocky ground. As the story is told through the eyes of a 10 year old girl, the author goes to great lengths to explore the world through the vivid colours of youth. The

innocence of youth is superimposed on a backdrop that is ultimately violent, disturbed and not at all child friendly.

I enjoyed the contrasts in the story. Ruby was a stark contrast to her best friend, her parents were contrasts of each other, her view of her world and the reality of it were very different and the list goes on. The theme was deftly used throughout the novel with great success. It resulted in a compelling coming of age story intertwined with a mystery.

Yes there are children. Yes there is a coming of age story. No, this is not a book for children. Despite the innocent Ruby, there is lack of innocence in her town. While the reader bears the full brunt of the danger, murder and desperation, Ruby sees it as a chance to investigate with Dad and a chance to do grown up things. The story is occasionally disturbing and often suspenseful. Do not read this and think you are getting a "cozy" mystery. There is enough drama and thrills to cause palpitations in the light of heart.

While I often enjoy books with a slow pace, this one stated especially slow. Ultimately, my overall enjoyment of the story and the characters as well as the atmospheric setting led me to give it top honours and to highly recommend this to lovers of Thrillers and Suspense. If anything, hang on to the this book for the ending scenes. I did manage to clue into the killer before the big reveal but it was not a let down and I don't think it will disappoint you either.

Content Advisories

It is difficult to find commentary on the sex/violence/language content of book if you are interested. I make an effort to give you the information so you can make an informed decision before reading. *Disclaimer* I do not take note or count the occurrences of adult language as I read. I am simply giving approximations.

Scale 1 - Lowest 5 - Highest

Sex - **2**

We are told that the victims are forced to strip. That said, there is no descriptions of anatomy or graphic elements. There is some sexual language noted below.

Language - **3**

Mild obscenities are used in a small amount and handful of f-words appears. The majority of adult language is language that was used was derogatory to women, i.e. whore, slag, bitch. The usage was low to moderate.

Violence - **3**

There are multiple murder and multiple murder attempts. Realistically, the violence is a backdrop and counterpoint to the character of Ruby. The murders are disturbing in the fact that the women are forced to call their mothers first but they are not graphic. The violence is not pervasive but an ominous presence in the background. There final few scene are tense and filled with potential violence.

Bookread2day says

Every killer has to start somewhere.

In a small community of Limeburn the headlines of their Gazette paper, MASKED MAN STRIKES AGAIN GIRL 17, IN BEACH ASSAULT. The police becoming concerned after a second attack, with a man wearing a black balaclava that threatens his victims with violence as he makes his victims phone home to say goodbye.

Ten -year-old Ruby Trick a daddy's girl is taken out by her daddy to look for the man in the mask. As they take their journey around in the rain they pick up some women who are waiting for a bus and see that they get home safely to their front door.

The facts of Life and Death by Belinda Bauer holds rather nerving events. This is my first book that I have read of Belinda Bauer's and will not be my last.

A.J. Waines says

What I love about Belinda Bauer's books is that they are so much more than the story. The quality of the writing seems to encapsulate so many different facets. There's a bizarre macabre humour, a quirky, original view of the world, innocence and tenderness - all within a dark and cracking-good crime thriller!

In The facts of Life and Death, there are two strands - a serial killer in a small seaside village, snatching late-night foolish hitch-hikers and a family that centres around a girl of ten, Ruby, learning to cope with bullying at school and discord at home between her parents. The police are on the trail of the twisted killer who forces the women to strip, then call their mothers to say 'goodbye'. Creepy indeed. Ruby starts writing a diary and what she sees and who she's with begins to hold significance for both threads of the novel.

Ruby is portrayed with humanity and there's a 'coming of age', transformational element to her story. She is so well drawn in 3D, she jumps off the page. I did not know where the story was heading, which I always love and the unpredictability is coupled with unusual, clever, true to life, even laugh out loud moments.

I thoroughly recommend this book - I was sad to reach the end.

Liz Barnsley says

‘Call your mother.’

‘What do I say?’

‘Say goodbye.’

This is how it begins. Living with her parents in the dank beach community of Limeburn, ten-year-old Ruby Trick has her own fears. Bullies on the school bus, the forest crowding her house into the sea, and the threat of divorce.

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As long as the killer doesn't catch her first..

So I recently read "Rubbernecker" from Belinda Bauer, also incidentally the first novel of hers I have read since Blacklands and it was so good that I was kind of worried that this one would fall flat. It absolutely did not do any such thing.

We follow along mostly with ten year old Ruby as she explores her world, puts up with bullies, hangs out with her friends and observes her people – she adores Daddy and is determined that he will be happy despite the fact that her parents are not getting on. Meanwhile young women are going missing, as a fledgling killer becomes more confident.

This was an extremely clever psychological thriller, especially as young Ruby's viewpoint was so very authentic – she behaves like a ten year old with all the curiosity and wonder that time of life brings – and it was a different take on the way an adult would look at the world or peoples actions. Ruby, whilst helping her Dad try and track the killer, ends up with a lot of information that she doesn't realise is important. Offset that against the beautifully drawn police team (and not cliché at all – I thought Calvin was probably one of the most realistic sounding Police Officers I have ever read in fiction and boss Kirsty King was delightfully normal) and you have a cleverly constructed, character driven tale of the darker side of human nature. A thing that is a particular strength of Ms Bauers if this and Rubbernecker together are anything to go by.

Aptly titled – The Facts of Life and Death are indeed right in here – I thought this was terrifically good. Certainly one of my favourite "crime" novels I have read in 2014 so far.

Very much recommended.

Happy Reading Folks!

Sharon Bolton says

"In Rock Cottage the living room floor had bulged and finally splintered to reveal a root of oak as thick as a man's leg."

The village of Limeburn in Devon, beset by encroaching tides on one side, and the insidious creep of the forest on the other, in constant danger of being crushed to sand by twin forces of nature, is home to the Trick family. Ten year old, red-haired, lonely Ruby shares her father's impatience with her mother, who always seems to be working or nagging them about sleep and vegetables. Ruby is Daddy's little girl, especially since he joined the Gunslingers, a group of amateur cowboys who hang out in nearby Clovelly to talk spurs and replica weapons in fake American accents. John Trick buys his overweight child's affection with tall tales, macho bragging and Mars Bars.

The story begins quietly, unusually for Bauer, with a rather gentle tale of a small, struggling family in a dank Gothic setting. Ruby, of course, grabs a hold of our hearts and has us rooting for her very quickly but others in the small community are intriguing and engaging too. At this stage the book almost seems to be shaping up to be a 21st century Cranford.

Then – oh my goodness – chapter five! One of the most terrifying scenes I've ever read. It comes from nowhere, it grabs hold of that Ruby-softened heart with a damp, cold hand and squeezes hard. No spoiler,

this is included in the cover blurb, but if you're a mother, this really is your WORST possible nightmare.

After that, it's only a matter of time before another of those horrible scenes jumps out at us. We can't relax, and neither can the residents of Limeburn and Clovelly.

To everyone who's lived through the wettest British winter in living memory, this book will seem scarily, remarkably topical. When memories of seaside towns disappearing beneath waves, sea-walls being breached and even railways collapsing into the surf remain fresh in our minds, we feel the nervousness of Ruby, her friends and family, as the winds batter the house, the spray strikes the windows and the tides get ever higher. Once we know there's a madman around, we share their terror.

There is much to praise in this book. I loved the creepy, damp, dripping setting, and the dynamic between the three members of the Trick family. I loved the dopey, daydreaming detective, Calvin Bridge, facing an imminent shot-gun wedding, and drowning beneath a sea of hand-torn invitations, three-ply napkins and pink sugared-almonds. I loved plain, well-meaning, rabbit-keeping Miss Sharpe. One of Bauer's great strengths is her ability to create funny, engaging characters who are both intriguingly different and completely believable at the same time.

Is *The Facts of Life and Death* Bauer's best? Not sure. I did love it, and really enjoyed her being Gothic for a change, but I suspect most readers will still plump for either *Blacklands* or *Rubbernecker* as their favourite. This book is quieter, more subtle, and may not get the same attention as its two flashier, older brothers. On the other hand, it's an extremely credible addition to her body of work, and almost certainly one of the best crime novels we'll see this year.

Louise Wilson says

Lone women are terrorised and their helpless families forced to watch - in a sick game where only one player knows the rules.

Ten year old Ruby Trick lives with her parents in the dank beach community of Limeburn. She is bullied on the school bus about her weight. Her dad lost his job three years ago but he is also Ruby's best friend. Her mum is either nagging Ruby and her dad or at her work. With her parents not getting along, Ruby is worried they will divorce.

A killer has been abducting young women and forcing them to call their mothers before they are killed. Ruby's father belongs to a Friday night Cowboy group where they also dress up like Cowboys. They decide to form a posse and search for the killer. Ruby goes with her dad on these searches.

The book starts a bit slow as it introduces us to its characters and gives us a little of their background. Then around chapter five it starts picking up its pace which it then maintains to the end. My heartstrings were pulled as we learn how Ruby was treated by everyone but I also laughed at some of the things she wrote in her diary. This is an intensely gripping, page turning thriller. You do get hints of who the killer is and it does get a bit obvious who it is but that does not spoil the book in any way.

Brenda says

The subtitle of this book is "Every killer has to start somewhere." This is an extremely chilling story. Someone is starting at the beginning, learning and growing, until madness completely overcomes.

More than a story about a murderer, this is a story about a young girl learning the facts of life and death firsthand. Ruby is an innocent and inquisitive ten year old. As the book progresses, she gets smarter and more aware of what's happening. I wondered if she was being made into a killer or not. There are signs that give me hope for her.

Bauer states at the end that she wrote this during a personally dark year. If she can write this well when her life is off kilter, imagine what her future books will be when life is kinder to her! I am so looking forward to The Shut Eye.

Brenda says

Ten year old Ruby Trick loved her Daddy; she adored him and he loved her right back – “*Love you hundreds*” was their common refrain. But Ruby wasn’t too sure about Mummy. Daddy and Mummy never used to row, they would never raise their voices to each other, but since Daddy had lost his job and Mummy had to work twice as hard to support them all, things had been gradually getting worse. Mummy was always nagging Daddy and upsetting him...

Their house was a ramshackle old dwelling called The Retreat – the cracks and holes in the walls would make whistling sounds with the wind, but Ruby was used to it. Their little village of Limeburn was right on the cliff overlooking the ocean – Ruby was always watching the sea and waiting for it to eat into the forest and then gobble up her house. Plus school was a torment for Ruby with the bullies always picking on her – but she loved her teacher, Miss Sharpe, who always had a kind word for Ruby.

Suddenly young women were going missing from Limeburn – the terror of being told to call their mothers to say goodbye was only the beginning. The ghastly game that was being played by an evil and twisted killer had the local police stumped; so Ruby’s Daddy, John Trick and some of his friends decided to find the killer themselves. And Ruby begged her Daddy to let her go too....

I loved this intense and gripping thriller! The twists and turns were great, the pace was fast and kept me reading well into the night. I have no hesitation in recommending this book to all thriller lovers.

With thanks to The Reading Room and the publisher for my copy to read and review.

Kevin says

Ten-year old Ruby Trick lives in Devon on the edge of a dangerous sea on one side and the woods that seem to encroach on her family's home on the other. She is bullied on the bus with constant comments about her weight. Her father is her best friend..."Love you hundreds, Dad." He has been out of work for three years since the shipbuilding plant where he used to work has closed. He spends his time fishing, drinking cider and

hanging out with Ruby.

Ruby's mom seems to either be at work or nagging on Ruby, her father, or both. Her parents aren't getting along and it seems divorce is just around the corner.

A killer has been abducting women and forcing them to call their mothers before they are killed. Ruby's father and his cowboy Friday group decide to go looking for the killer.

Belinda Bauer is truly a wonder! Every time I read one of her books I think it is the best book I have read for a very long time. I'm a little sick because I now have read all of her brilliant books. Truly this book gets all five dazzling stars! I give this one the "Kevin's Gushing Guarantee."

Paromjit says

Belinda Bauer writes a dark, gothic, and creepy story of the making of a killer, roaming in North Devon, and Bideford. He wears a balaclava, terrorising young women, making them strip, assaulting them, and making them call their mothers and say goodbye, before long he is murdering them. 10 year old overweight Ruby Trick lives in the tiny community of Limeburn, surrounded by a forest intent on taking it over. It is damp and wet, close to the sea, and their tiny home shows the effects of the infiltrating nature. Ruby is obsessed with wanting a pony, but there seems little chance of her dream coming true. She is indisputably a daddy's girl, his views and attitudes soaking into her. John Trick used to work, in the shipyards and more, but has been unemployed for some time now, much to his wife, Alison's dismay. Alison is the sole breadwinner, relying on seasonal work as a chef.

Ruby's world consists of going to school, being bullied on the bus, and playing with the small group of children around home, particularly Adam, and scaring themselves silly. She writes a diary, keeping track of what she does and what happens, an inspiration from school, although she often goes to great effort to try and avoid school and she worries that her parents are going to divorce as their discord grows. John goes fishing, but lives for his life of pretence as a cowboy, part of a small group who meet weekly at a pub. The group decide to look for the killer, given the police have had little success, and John takes the excited Ruby with him in the car often at night, calling her his deputy as he works his way through the numerous beer cans. An unaware Ruby is to soon find herself in the sights of the killer and all the accompanying danger. DCI Kirsty King, and DC Calvin Bridge, brother of the hairless Louis in Snap, are putting their efforts into identifying the killer, but it is not an easy case. Calvin has become engaged to girlfriend, Shirley, more because he doesn't want to upset the applecart, although all the unwanted intensive wedding planning is stretching his tolerance levels.

Bauer writes in her trademark style, a story bursting at the seams with atmosphere and such a brilliant sense of location. It is intertwined with humour and wit, with marvellous characterisation, even with minor characters such as Donald Moon, the litter picker and Georgia Sharpe, the schoolteacher. I love the way it slowly dawns on Ruby that a killer is close by as she pieces together fragments of knowledge. As usual, I found myself delighted, consumed and entertained by the superior writing gifts of Belinda Bauer. Highly Recommended!

Zoe says

Absorbing, gritty and exceptionally dark!

This is a compelling story set in North Devon, England and is told from the perspective of Ruby, an innocent 10-year-old girl who finds herself not only struggling with coming-of-age but with a family in turmoil and a village plagued by a serial killer.

The prose is direct and clear. The characterization is well done with a cast of characters that are troubled, raw and distinctive and a setting that is a character itself with its dreariness, history, rugged terrain and isolation.

This truly is an intelligent, atmospheric novel with a clever, meticulous plot filled with tension, danger, suspense, twists, intrigue and murder that delves into the murkiest corners of the human psyche and highlights how much rage and malice can actually exist in those you least expect.

Thank you to PGC Books for providing me with a copy in exchange for an honest review.

All my reviews can be found on my blog at <http://whatsbetterthanbooks.com>

Roxann says

From the cover: On the beaches and cliffs of North Devon, lone women have become victims in a terrifying game where only one player knows the rules. And when those rules change, the new game is murder. But a madman on the loose feels very far from the crumbling, seaside home of ten-year-old Ruby Trick. Instead she lives in constant fear of school bullies, the dark forest crowding her house into the sea, and the threat of her parents' divorce. Helping her father to catch the killer seems like the only way to keep him close. As long as the killer doesn't catch her first.

I received the book for free through Goodreads Giveaways.

I loved this book all the way from its damp/wet setting, to the dysfunctional Trick family. I loved the main characters-the Trick family and the two detectives. All the characters seemed so real-even the very bad one. The plot with all its twists and turns was engaging. At first it was a slow moving book, but the pace picked up and kept me reading-it was hard to put down the book. I would recommend this book to people who like thrillers/mysteries.
