



Ninepins

Rosy Thornton

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Deep in the Cambridgeshire fens, Laura is living alone with her 12-year old daughter Beth, in the old tollhouse known as Ninepins.

Ninepins Details

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From Reader Review Ninepins for online ebook

Julischka says

Laura ist alleinerziehend und lebt mit ihrer 11jährigen Tochter Beth in einem alten Haus in den East Anglian Fens.

Das dazugehörige umgebaute ehemalige Pumpenhaus wird regelmäßig an Studenten vermietet.

In diesem Jahr ist die Studentin, die eigentlich einziehen sollte kurzfristig abgesprungen und so nimmt Laura die 17jährige Willow auf, ein Pflegekind, das von ihrem Sozialarbeiter Vince zwar noch begleitet wird, aber langsam in die Selbstständigkeit entlassen werden soll.

Willow ist das Kind einer psychisch kranken Hippie-mutter, die sich nie richtig um sie kümmerte und ständig mit ihr von Ort zu Ort zog.

Laura muss nicht nur mit der neuen Mieterin klarkommen, sondern auch mit der Tatsache, daß aus ihrer Tochter ein pubertierender Teenager wird, der gegen sie rebeliert.

Und dann ist da noch Vince, der die Bewohner von Ninepins regelmäßig besucht...

Ich habe das Buch 'Ninepins' im Rahmen einer Giveaway-Aktion auf Maria Grazies Blog Fly High gewonnen. Vielen Dank an Maria Grazia und an die Autorin Rosy Thornton!!!

Rosy Thornton hat einen wundervollen Schreibstil. Ein paar Wörter habe ich nachgeschlagen, weil mein Englisch nicht immer so sattelfest ist, aber das macht nichts.

Sie beschreibt die Landschaft und ihre Personen wirklich anschaulich, was mir sehr gut gefallen hat.

Laura, aus deren Sicht die Geschichte erzählt wird, war mir direkt sehr sympathisch, auch wenn sie manchmal etwas übermutterhaft daherkam.

Vince und Lauras Exmann, die einzigen wirklich vorhandenen männlichen Hauptpersonen waren mir auch sehr sympathisch, vor allem der Exmann mit seiner chaotischen, neuen Familie.

Willow ist ein einzigerischer Teenager an der Schwelle zum Erwachsensein. Sie muss ihren Platz im Leben erst finden. Die Zerissenheit, die daraus resultiert und den Schmerz, den ich beim Lesen stellenweise spüren konnte, machen das Buch zu einem tollen Leseerlebnis.

Beth, die Tochter von Laura hätte ich stellenweise am liebsten mal kräftig geschüttelt, aber das muss bei Pubertierenden wohl so sein ;-)

Insgesamt ist 'Ninepins' ein ruhiges Buch, daß sich mit den Problemen von ganz normalen Menschen beschäftigt. Es gibt keine großen Knalleffekte, aber ich war von der ersten bis zur letzten Seite gefesselt und kann das Buch jedem empfehlen, der solche Bücher mag.

Geoffrey Gudgion says

Atmospheric, gently paced but with totally believable and engaging characters, with a powerful sense of place. A delightful read.

Hilary says

Rosy Thornton's fifth and latest novel is set in a majestic and wholly believable fenland landscape, and concerns Laura and her daughter Beth, who live in a unique situation next to a lode. Part of the property is a

separate building, a pump house, which Laura lets out. Their latest tenant is Willow, an enigmatic care leaver with a chaotic past, who under the eye of her social worker Vince is taking a first step towards independent living.

Rosy Thornton, as ever, displays what a beautiful writer she is, and how well she reveals the inner life of her characters. Once again, she writes of women (and I include the 12 year old Beth in this) who are negotiating change in their lives with resilience and courage. At the same time, the reality of growing up with all its angst, feeling the temptation to be cool, and experiencing the unique brand of cruelty that young girls mete out to one another, are described with perception and precision. Even as she appears trailing mystery and slight menace, I found myself rooting for the 17 year old Willow. It is obvious how much Thornton empathises with her young characters and as a result makes them so believable. She also manages to avoid a stereotype with a credible scenario of social care, in Vince, Willow's social worker, getting it right, getting it wrong, but doing his best to embody a figure of trust after an ambiguous start - and later something more?

As with *The Tapestry Of Love*, the landscape is pretty well a character in its own right. Lovingly yet fearlessly described, the fens formed a visible backdrop in my mind's eye as I read the novel, sometimes taking centre stage, as when the waters that are kept in check with such difficulty rise up and flood the pump house. Laura's deep love for this rebarbative countryside, with its enormous sky and straight lines, makes her decision to continue living in such isolation all of a piece with her undoubted strength of character. It almost seems recklessly brave - I know I'd have taken the better part and moved back to Cambridge. (While we're on the subject, another aspect of Laura's heroic qualities that I could never emulate is her tolerance of her ex - I'd have found it almost too hard to refrain from crowning him with a heavy object.)

Yet again, Rosy Thornton explores the sacrificial and the civilised in family breakdown, which is so heartening. Her writing goes from strength to strength, and, while this novel moves into darker territory of mental illness and the pain of growing up in chaos, she reminds us of the bonds of love that can bind us and how much there can be left over to share.

Beadyjan says

This is a lovely read, quite difficult to categorize in a way, it's a gentle romance but not slushy or sleazy in any way. It's character driven and the characters are extremely well drawn and realistic. There is a subtle tension which runs through it although I wouldn't class it as a thriller as such but there is certainly an air of suspense which builds throughout the unfolding story and the wonderful bleak, misty and menacing setting of the Cambridgeshire Fens, is so well painted that I felt I'd just spent some time there despite never having set foot in that area in my life!

Mostly this is a story about motherhood, womanhood, female relationships and adapting to change and will appeal to a wide range of readers although especially Mums with teenage daughters.

The Mum in the story, Laura, is a divorced single Mother to Beth, 12 years old, who is riddled with pre teen angst, puberty and asthma. Her struggles to fit in, avoid being bullied and attempts to be one of the in crowd, mirror her Mum's struggles to say and do the right things to her daughter and often end up making cringingly awful yet minor mistakes which alienate rather than support.

It took me right back to my early teen years!

Into their lives floats Willow, a teenager in care with a bit of a past at 17 young enough to be a friend to Beth, but will her influence be a good one and when she becomes a tenant of the small pump house cottage

owned by Laura bringing her social worker Vince, and her own teenage insecurities into their lives what repercussions will this have.

Rosy Thornton is a highly accomplished author, drawing on her own experiences and her skills with words to create an environment we instantly feel at home in and characters we feel we know even though they might not be ones we can completely relate to.

If you enjoy beautifully constructed descriptions, characters created with finesse and skill and a story which builds to a satisfactory climax you should enjoy this latest offering from Rosy.

Jessica says

I received this book for free from the publisher. All content and opinions are my own.

Rosy Thornton is a well-loved British author. And deservedly so. I thoroughly enjoyed her last novel, *The Tapestry of Love*. So, when Ms. Thornton contacted me about her newest work, *Ninepins* I eagerly awaited the package from Royal Mail.

Laura is a single mother to 12-year-old Beth. They live in the Cambridgeshire fens at an old tollhouse known as *Ninepins*. To bring in extra income, Laura usually rents the pumphouse out to students. This year, though, she's persuaded by a social worker, Vince, to board 17-year-old Willow, who is leaving foster care.

If I had only two words to describe this book, they would be domestic and subtle. It was very much centered on the day-to-day, on the relationships among the characters. Laura and Beth are forging a new relationship, leaving behind Beth's childhood. This story line about broke my heart. Likely because my 2-year-old is finding some independence and it's hard to let go. Laura and Vince's relationship is very slow and kind of sneaked up on me. And then there is Willow and her mother, Marianne. This is obviously a very nuanced relationship, as Marianne is mentally ill, and Willow was severely neglected as a child.

I enjoyed seeing how these (and other) relationships played out. And the landscape was an interesting character in and of itself. But the book as a whole just didn't quite come together for me. Perhaps it was because this is a very British book and the landscape and some of the language were unfamiliar to me. But mostly, I think, because it contained small scenes that were interesting but sometimes didn't feel like they built up to anything. And, really, that is how real life is. I just don't know how I feel about it in books.

Overall, though, I enjoyed *Ninepins* and would recommend it as a good, calm read.

Jill says

If characters were perfect, there wouldn't be much material for a book. On the other hand, one can't make them too obnoxious, or readers wouldn't want to hang out with them for the length of the story. In *Ninepins*, Rosy Thornton had me right at the brink of "too irritating" with her primary protagonist, Laura.

Laura, a divorced mom with primary custody of her daughter Beth, who has just turned twelve, has never heard of the notion that mothers may, in fact, discipline their daughters. Beth is going through rough times –

not only because she wants so much to be “normal” and fit in, but because she is hanging out in school with a very bad group of girls who have somehow convinced her they are desirably cool. Beth starts getting into a great deal of trouble, including smoking although she has asthma, skipping choir practice and letting down the whole group, shoplifting, yelling at her mother and other adults to “shut up!” and at one point, even shouting at her mother that she was “a miserable, controlling old cow.” No matter: Laura doesn’t say a word, nor does she deny Beth anything she wants. There is no docking of allowance, no abrogation of privileges, not even a lecture. It drove me crazy!

Still, I liked Laura (aside from her methods of parenting), and wanted to see how it would all come out (and, especially, if she would acquire some backbone).

Overly kind-hearted in addition to being a pushover, Laura rents out a room at her homestead (called “Ninepins”) to a troubled 17-year-old, Willow, who was suspected of arson, and whose mentally ill mother, Marianne, has been deemed unable to care for her. Laura also becomes friends with Willow’s social worker, Vince.

As all of them get to know one another, even Willow notices how reluctant Laura is to “parent” Beth: “She [Laura] was always the one to appease and ingratiate; Willow has seen it over and over. It was pathetic, really, creeping around her kid, trying to please her all the time, as if Beth were the mother and Laura the child.”

And although Willow eventually gets close to Beth, she looks down on her outrageous provocations of Laura:

“Whining, crying – as if she had anything to complain about. Princess Beth with her perfect life, who had everything and took it all for granted; stupid, thoughtless Beth who had it all but was determined to wreck it, to chuck it all away. She would ruin everything, and not only for herself.”

The five main characters – Laura, Beth, Willow, Vince, and Willow’s mother Marianne – do a long slow minuet from being strangers or estranged to learning about each others’ pasts and starting to think in terms of each others’ futures. But with two troubled teens, one psychotic mother, one inadequate mother, and one lonely social worker, the road is difficult and even dangerous.

Evaluation: Rosy Thornton is a skillful portrayer of family dynamics, but her stories move along at a languid pace. This characteristic is something many readers appreciate. I, being both a Type A personality and a Type A reader, am more inclined not to be the best audience for this type of writing. But I don’t mean at all to disparage the book. It’s a good character study and a good exploration of the pressures of parenting. It’s just not necessarily a good fit for my own predilections as a reader.

LindyLouMac says

Ninepins is only the second novel I have read by this author and I have already discovered how important the role of the landscape plays in her writing. In *The Tapestry of Love* she brought the countryside of the French Cévennes alive on the printed page and this time she does it again with the very contrasting countryside of the Cambridgeshire Fens. Along with the strong sense of place Rosy Thornton also writes about characters that one feels are realistically portrayed. There is quite a strong element of suspense in Ninepins as the story

unfolds as she explores the mother and daughter relationship that has become complicated by the arrival in their lives of a stranger with a very troubled past.

For some reason all the time I was reading this novel I kept thinking it had familiarities with a novel I had read previously. I was right if you have read Watershed you will understand what I mean as in that novel storms fire and floods cause some personal watersheds to be reached. The author also brings her story alive with her descriptions and details of the wildlife, landscape and flood defences of the Somerset levels. Ninepins might be set in the Cambridgeshire Fens but it certainly covers similar issues, so if you enjoyed Maggie Makepeace's novel I have no doubt you will also enjoy this one.

Ninepins is the name of the house nestled deep in the fens that is home to Laura and her daughter Beth. In the annexe to their home, an old pump house they usually have a lodger. The latest of these is Willow a teenager leaving a care home to live alone for the first time, who has been recommended to Laura as a suitable lodger by the girls social worker Vince. The story centres around the three females and the emotional tangle of their situations as the world that Laura previously thought so orderly seems to be spiralling out of control. A daughter growing up too fast and wanting more independence than Laura is prepared to grant her plus a vulnerable older teenager who seems to be a volatile threat to their family life. Will it all end in disaster, I recommend you read it to find out.

As a novel about mother daughter relationships and how we have to adapt to change within these relationships it will especially appeal to those already parents. Although that does not mean those without children will not enjoy it but just relate to the story in a different way.

<http://lindyloumacbookreviews.blogspot.com>

Lindsay says

‘Didn’t every kid deserve a chance?’

Ninepins is the old tollhouse where Laura lives with her 12-year-old daughter Beth. Laura often rents out the pumphouse next to her house to students, but the newest resident is to be someone different, a 17-year-old girl named Willow, who has been in care, and has been recommended for the accommodation by her social worker, Vince.

Laura has reservations and Willow coming to live at the pumphouse, and is nervous as to how the new arrangement will work, and what sort of influence Willow may be on Beth. Beth herself is bringing more than her share of worries into Laura’s life too, having started secondary school and making new friends who Laura knows little about, but what she does know doesn’t please her and makes her anxious about Beth. For Beth, there is the struggle to find her place amongst the teenage girls at school, to fit in and develop friendships with all the accompanying pressures amongst girls at that age.

I loved this novel. I liked the immediacy with which we were drawn straight into the story and the setting. I felt I was immersed in the wildlife and landscape of the Cambridgeshire fens, very nearby to where I live; they are vividly brought to life as the backdrop of this story; the author illustrates both the beauty and the dangers of the place. I found the characters intriguing and believable, and the dialogue equally convincing and apt. I felt that Rosy Thornton portrayed the love, the difficulties and confrontations between Laura and Beth very realistically, and depicted the strong, yet at times fraught, relationships between mothers and

daughters very successfully. The author contrasts the loving, caring and concerned nature of Laura's parenting of Beth, with her always having provided the necessities for a safe, warm welcoming home, even as a single-parent, with the at times 'wonderful, magical, intoxicating' behaviour of Willow's mother, who nonetheless left Willow feeling that 'She'd never just felt safe.'

There were poignant moments, in particular between Willow and Laura, as Laura discovers more about Willow's younger years, and how unsettled life was for her with her mother, Marianne. There are so many times when we, as a reader, identify with elements of a novel, and this struck a chord with me, and I was moved by some of the passages, as Laura realised what life must have been like for Willow: 'If Willow at times seemed older than her years, this might be the reason. If the mother could not be a mother, how should the child be a child?' As both Laura and the reader learn more about Willow's mother and her past, the tension and sense of foreboding builds.

It's an absorbing story that I enjoyed returning to every time I picked the book up again, more than anything I think because of how much I was immersed in the setting of the novel and intrigued and convinced by the characters and the development of the relationships between them, whether it was those between parent and child, adult and young adult, or the elements of gentle romance and attraction between adults. This is the first novel I have read by this author, and it has certainly encouraged me to want to go back and dip into her earlier works. This is assured storytelling and a satisfying read.

Stefanie says

I've read a couple of books by Rosy Thornton now and liked them so when I had the chance to read her newest, *Ninepins*, I couldn't refuse. She didn't let me down.

Set in the fens of Cambridgeshire at an old house known as Ninepins, Laura has been renting out the pumphouse (an old drainage station) to college students. The house falls empty and this time Laura is persuaded to rent it to a 17-year-old girl named Willow. Willow has had a troubled past, but Laura is assured by her social worker, Vince, that everything will be fine. Laura's twelve-year-old daughter, Beth, hits it off with Willow and Laura is immediately worried about Willow's influence. But it isn't Willow Laura has to worry about. Beth is at a new school and has fallen in with some girls of dubious motives. But the more Laura tries to be Momma Bear and protect Beth, the more Beth struggles and rebels. At one point Willow slyly notes,

Laura acted as if fresh vegetables and proper home-cooked meals could solve every problem, could make things whole again when they were broken. But they couldn't. Nothing could.

As the story progresses we learn more about Willow's childhood and her own mother, Marianne, who is in a mental hospital.

Marianne and Willow present a neat contrast to Laura and Beth. Both single mothers with only daughters, they did and are doing the best they can. But Marianne's untreated mental illness made Willow's childhood especially hard. To Laura, Marianne is motherhood gone all wrong. Willow is envious of Beth and thinks she has nothing to complain about while Beth thinks Willow is the ultimate in cool. The story presents the contrasts without judging. Not once is Marianne condemned for being a bad mother. Instead, we are asked to be sympathetic and understanding, to realize we have blinders and biases and fears that get in the way of

being able to see and understand the needs and motives of other people.

Ninepins is a non-sappy and realistic book about mothers and daughters. There is a love interest for Laura but this is low-key and beyond the point of the story. It does, however, get addressed as potentially changing the dynamic of Laura and Beth's relationship should it progress to something serious.

What I enjoy most about Thornton's writing is that the characters could be real people. Her stories are also every day sorts of stories that ponder the messiness of families and relationships. The tone of *Ninepins* is gentle but the story manages to be compelling. And while Willow might be right about a home-cooked meal not being able to fix things that are broken, she does find out that compassion and love go a long way towards making things whole again.

Best Crime Books & More says

I have read all of Rosy Thornton's books and one of my favourites was her last book *Tapestry of Love*. I was looking forward to her new book with its particularly enticing cover. *Ninepins* tells the story of Laura who lives with her 12 year old daughter Beth at an old Tollhouse known as *Ninepins*. The pump house is an extra source of income for her so she rents it out to 17 year old Willow. What she isn't prepared for is the change to her orderly life that Willow will bring. From early on Rosy takes us on the beautifully descriptive ride through the Cambridgeshire Fens. What I love about her books is that they are so easy to read yet so descriptive; you could almost be sitting there looking down over Laura's house and life. Laura is a somewhat neurotic mother and with Willow on the scene we start to see changes with both Beth and their lives in general as Willow becomes more ingrained in their day to day lives. Willow was a really interesting character and there was a certain sense of mystery to her and her past life.

The story caught me very early on and there is a certain element of something dark and sinister that surrounds the story. Willow has a man named Vince from Social Services who wants the best for Willow. Laura isn't sure whether Willow is a damaged and vulnerable young woman, or somebody who has become a danger to herself and others through her past secrets surrounding her mother. The story was something of a mystery to me in one respect, but in another it made perfect sense. Yes, I know, sometimes I don't make sense even in my own head! There are certain events that take place which set to shock the reader, and I especially didn't like one event which puts Beth in danger! The story certainly has lots going on, but overall it seems to be more the journey of a mother and daughter, and a very withdrawn 17 year old catapulted into their home and the way they make things work.

I particularly liked Vince, and although Laura irritated me sometimes (I wanted to tell her to get some backbone) I think the book is meant to make you feel like that. It's certainly a book that looks closely at relationships and emotions. As usual I thoroughly enjoyed the book and was disappointed when it finished. I still think *Tapestry of Love* is my all time favourite, but this certainly comes a close second.

Adele says

I have read all of Rosy Thornton's books and I think that this latest book is by far her best. The subject is much darker than her previous novels but the writing is compelling and atmospheric. Her description of the

Cambridgeshire Fenlands is beautiful and you get a real sense of her love for the area.

She introduces us to Laura, a divorcee and mother to 12 year old Beth. I believe that any mother with teenagers will identify with Laura's struggle to let her daughter grow up as she moves from the relative safety of the contained environment in primary school to the myriad of new experiences of the secondary school. The child that depended on her for everything and who was the centre of her existence is making the first tentative steps to forging her own way in life and Laura struggles to find the compromise between keeping her daughter safe and letting her spread her wings. At times it made for uncomfortable reading as I recognised the mistakes she was about to make and knew that I would probably have done the exact same in her situation.

In contrast to the relationship between Beth and Laura we have Willow, who's experience of family life couldn't have been more different. She was brought up in a series of foster homes after her bipolar mother was unable to care for her and at 17 yrs old is supported by social services and placed in lodgings in Laura's pump house. We get a hint of something a little menacing in Willow's past which is heightened when her mother turns up uninvited at Ninepins.

A series of unfortunate events thrust the three women and Vince, (Willow's social worker) together and they all have to adapt their attitudes and learn to make adjustments to accommodate the needs of the others.

I would like to have been given a greater insight into Willow's thoughts and feelings, we get a few snip bits in flash backs but they do little to tell us what interests her. We are not told how she fills her days alone at the pump house, nor even what course she is supposed to be doing at the college, or very much about her reaction to certain events such as the arrival of her mother. We are lead to believe that the 2 girls become close and spend time together but at no point do we get any insight into what they actually talk about. At various points I wanted to know what Willow would say to Beth, about her experience of being bullied for example, and I wondered if Willow might not compare her own experiences to Beth's and tell the younger girl to be more grateful for what she already had.

There is a love interest in the book in the form of Vince. It is a subtle love story which I like because the main story has to be the relationship between the women, each of them vulnerable and damaged in their own ways. We don't get much of a picture of Laura's married life although her relationship with her ex husband is very amicable and she obviously remains fond of him, but it is very hard to visualise them actually living together as her life is so controlled and his is so chaotic. Vince is an altogether more robust, dependable character and he helps give Laura an insight into her daughter's problems. It's nice that Laura has him to bounce problems off but I'm glad he didn't become a main part of the story.

All in all I think that this is Rosy Thompson's most accomplished piece of writing to date.

Laurel-Rain says

In the opening pages of this story of the struggles of life set in the English wetlands, "Ninepins" spotlights a single mother arriving home from her work as an academic researcher to find strangers waiting for her.

They have come to look at the pumphouse, which Laura Blackwood often lets out to students; the income from the rental helps Laura support herself and her 12-year-old daughter Beth. Her ex-husband Simon's support is sporadic at best, since he has a second family with three sons.

Surprisingly, the strangers are not ordinary renters, but a social worker who is there to "place" his seventeen-year-old charge Willow. Even as the situation slowly unfolds during the meeting, the enormity of it doesn't completely insert itself into Laura's awareness until some time later. By then, she is irretrievably entangled in the arrangement.

Over the next several months, the world around Laura and her brood will unravel in increasingly more dangerous ways. The dangers from the world outside through floods are only the first of many such events. Then there are the shifts in family dynamics that herald other dangers.

Will Beth's sudden rebellions reveal an underlying negative influence? What, if anything, does Willow have to do with the young girl's acting-out behavior? What secrets are both Willow and Beth keeping, and how will these inadvertent untruths impact and imperil their lives? And how will the recurring presence of Willow's birth mother, Marianne, affect all of the characters?

As the reader comes to understand some of the secrets and to evaluate the relationships, the characters will begin to show themselves and their true colors.

The author's prose was beautiful, describing the world in which the characters lived, as well as their interactions. The dialogue very typically exemplified the difficulties of the single-parent family, and how adding or subtracting elements from the mix can cause irrevocable shifts. The environment and its unpredictable floods seemed metaphorical for the shifting family dynamics. Five stars for this story that brought up all the emotions I have experienced as a single parent, unsure of the effects of others upon my children, and powerless to change what is happening in the world outside the home.

Michelle says

Rosy Thornton's latest novel, *Ninepins*, opens upon the world of the Cambridgeshire fens - earthen dikes that hold vigil over ancient moors and peat bogs, keeping battling against Mother Nature to keep the sea at bay. Enter Laura, a single mother trying to maintain her orderly world, but her twelve-year-old daughter is proving difficult to understand. The addition of Willow, a teenage girl with her own secrets and problems, only adds to the tension and confusion.

As in other novels, Ms. Thornton skillfully manages to create a complete world in a few powerful sentences. Each sentence in *Ninepins* is masterfully constructed to establish a painstaking attention to detail that allows the reader to create vivid mental images with a minimal amount of words. A reader could step onto the Cambridgeshire fens in real life and recognize certain sites based on their descriptions alone. These details also extend to Laura, her motivations, thoughts, and desires, as well as the minutest details of her apartment. It is akin to looking at a home movie, except there are no images to help fuel the reader's imagination.

Gloria is the type of heroine with whom mothers everywhere can relate, although liking her is something completely different. She is the quintessential mother hen, clucking after her chick and always prepared to viciously defend her. However, unlike a true mother hen, Gloria's problems stem from the fact that she finds it difficult to navigate the waters of teenage drama and struggles with learning to let go of the parenting reins. At the same time, she waffles between being the parent and being the child in her relationship with her daughter. It is a bit disconcerting to watch Laura complicate issues further because she is afraid to take a stand against her twelve-year-old. To that end, Vince is the perfect foil and thankfully adds some much-

needed common sense to the entire equation. Without him, the story would have a distinctly YA feel, where the parents are afterthoughts to the teen's antics.

Ninepins is the type of novel that draws a reader into a scene and makes them feel like they are a direct player in it. Readers will want to knock some sense into the characters because their actions can be almost painful to watch unfold. They can smell the pasta boiling, feel the dampness of the water-soaked earth, hear the chirping of the birds, and taste the multiple bottles of wine drunk throughout the novel. It is the type of semi-active participation within a novel that enhances a story. In *Ninepins*, the reader's involvement within the novel serves to offset the bitter aftertaste left by some of Laura's more annoying behaviors.

Ninepins is exactly what readers have come to expect from Ms. Thornton. As always, her prose is absolutely beautiful, with its poetic and lush descriptions and piercing dialogue that drives to the heart of her characters. She embraces the flaws in each of her characters, making them all the more realistic while offsetting some of the exoticness of her chosen locale. There is also a thoroughness to her explanations that guarantee readers have a thorough understanding of each of the main characters' motivations and thought processes. Readers may have issues with characters' actions, or lack thereof, but they cannot complain that they do not understand why a character acts a certain way. The result is a gorgeous exploration of relationships and their ever-changing nature.

Acknowledgments: Thank you to the author for my review copy!

Jane says

Most people would probably agree that, despite all good advice, they generally do judge a book by its cover to a certain extent. When you go to the library or the book shelf for a browse, the books with the appealing covers tend to stand out; whilst I wouldn't buy a book based solely on its cover, first impressions do count for a lot.

I came across *Ninepins*, not in a book shop, or on a library shelf, but at my book group. Being a library book group, we tend to read things that the librarian can get in sufficient numbers, and this book was readily available. When I saw the cover, I was less than enthralled. To me, it looks a bit like something I could have knocked up myself on Photoshop at home. Sure, sunsets are nice, but they are a little generic, and that's what I worried the book was going to be. I had never read any of Rosy Thornton's novels before, and I couldn't actually see myself reading this one.

But with the next book group meeting looming, and recognising that I hadn't read last month's assigned book either, I thought I should at least give it a go. It took about two chapters for me to realise that it is with good reason that the age-old advice of not judging a book by its cover is age-old: it's sound advice.

For me, the main attraction of *Ninepins* was the atmosphere that Rosy Thornton manages to create. Laura lives in an old tollhouse on the Cambridgeshire fens with her twelve-year-old daughter. Laura and Beth's simple life is disrupted when Laura agrees to rent her pumphouse to seventeen-year-old Willow, a troubled teenager who is under the care of a social worker, Vince. Laura has problems of her own to deal with, as Beth, having just started secondary school, is making new friends and beginning to test the boundaries as only teenage (or near-teenage) girls know how.

This disruption and unease are reflected perfectly in the everchanging environment of the fens. Oppressive

heat, excessive rain, perilous ice; they all wield their power over the tollhouse and its inhabitants. All the while, with Laura knowing that Willow was once guilty of arson, the threat of fire looms over their heads as Laura tries to keep her daughter safe, and finds herself increasingly involved in Willow's life.

(view spoiler)

I thoroughly enjoyed *Ninepins*, it was such a pleasant surprise after I had unfairly judged the book based solely on a photograph of a sunset.

Richard Sutton says

A Dose of Redemption in the Dance of Mothers and Daughters

Ninepins was a departure from my usual genres, but one I'm very glad I made. First, the most abiding character seems to be the ever-pervasive damp and flat, open light of the fens, which Ms. Thornton's descriptive skills brought into sharp focus for me. The writing transporting me to a place I've never been, with unexpected familiarity. The setting is a force that Laura and her daughter do battle with daily. Their moods, fears and afflictions shift and flow as regularly as the water table rises. The featureless, almost dismal landscape is a perfect stage upon which to evoke disappointment, anxiety, and a mother's constant fear of having done the wrong thing. As conflicted, exhausted and repressed as Laura is, her daughter is on the verge of finding herself as an individual, an adult still in a child's body. Frustration broods conflict and anger in ever increasing degrees. Into this mix comes a boarder, a teen girl from a murky and decidedly troubled past who seems to stoke the fires of additional fears and worry. Throughout, the interactions of the single mother, her ailing daughter, the boarder and several intruders (welcome and not...) into their close little world, are portrayed with uncommon honesty. I recognized these people. Despite mounting uncertainty, the story carried me into a satisfying redemption and resolution. I also enjoyed the distinctly local writing voice and references. Someone living outside the English fens, may require a bit of thinking to puzzle them out. Still, *Ninepins* was an evocative, enjoyable read I would recommend to anyone with children approaching their teens.
