



Somebody Else's Music

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Every school class has a target. It was just the way the world worked. A long time ago, in the small town of Hollman, Pennsylvania, it was Liz Toliver, once too smart and too shy for her own good. Today, she's a popular author, and an esteemed CNN panelist engaged to a rock star. She has everything—including nightmares about the dreadful summer night when she was seventeen. It was a practical joke by six female classmates that ended with Liz in a coma, a young boy with his throat slit, and unshakeable memories that she's never forgotten. Or forgiven. Now, thirty years later, she's coming home to visit old haunts, and play catch-up with old friends. The curious homecoming has captured the attention of Gregor Demarkian, retired chief of the FBI's Behavioral Sciences Unit. Doggedly pursuing the truth, he has his own questions about what really happened that night. But as a diabolical chain of events is triggered by Liz's return, no one will be prepared for the answers—or the final outcome...

Somebody Else's Music Details

Date : Published April 14th 2003 by Minotaur Books (first published 2002)

ISBN : 9780312983062

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Format : Paperback 496 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Cozy Mystery

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Joy says

To quote part of the thumbnail I wrote when I read SOMEBODY ELSE'S MUSIC in 2008:

Liz Toliver, tormented all through school, went away and became a celebrity author. The gang of bullies who made her young life miserable were cheerleaders, the prom queen, the "popular" group -- meaning everyone in town was afraid to offer Liz/Betsy any help. Now she's back, and all the stay-at-homes, the bullies who never fulfilled their promise, can't bear it. Surely that isn't motive enough for someone to murder the gang members one at a time. Liz, her family and close friends, and Gregor and his friends, tackle the murders during the outbreak of a storm as terrible as the storm in the mind of one of the townspeople.

Current comments:

Last time I took a grim pleasure in watching Haddam get her revenge against her own set of bullies (as she hints in her acknowledgements). This time around I simply enjoyed it. She well and truly shows them up. Liz's psychology also finds some very interesting parallels. And in Gregor's world we have a new set of people to like - Liz's family.

This was my favorite contemporary mystery read of 2008, and it may well be again in 2012.

ADDITION: Because of its breadth, depth, and drama, I am recategorizing this. It is my favorite Contemporary Fiction Read of 2012.

Kiwi Carlisle says

I would have given this five stars except that the degree of vitriol in the persecution of Liz Tolliver was so over the top. I was bullied as a kid myself, and I know it's hideously awful, but couldn't even ONE of her tormentors have grown up a little in 30 years? More than one of them says that she doesn't believe that people actually like to read, another says that she doesn't understand why anyone would want to be different. A third thinks that bullying victims deserve everything that is done to them, and she's a high school principal! Of course, the author sees that they all get their comeuppance and more. If I am reading the Acknowledgements correctly, the author was bullied herself. It shows. This is an otherwise good mystery, with appearances by popular recurring characters.

Abbey says

#18 Gregor Demarkian, ex-FBI profiler, small-town PA; cosy/psych thriller. Obsession and ambition mix tragically with high-school memories in a far too closely-knit community, as a "hometown-girl-makes-good!" story goes bad. An intensely cruel prank and a dead body clutter up memories of her senior year for writer Liz Tolliver, as she returns to her hometown for the first time in thirty years and finds far more than she bargained for, including murder. Gregor provides a welcome "outsider" viewpoint, as the majority of the characters appear to be in their own little world of in-jokes and The Right People, and have a bit of an

attitude problem.... Dark, and cruel look at the persistence of memory, and how some folks just never grow up.

NOTE: This is one of the few books I'd like to be able to give SIX stars to. And you don't have to be a fan of the series to enjoy it, as Demarkian actually plays a fairly small role.

Classic closed community setup, superbly shaded characters, tightly convoluted plot, and a sense of emotional connectedness to the story, make this one of Haddam's best. Although it's not at all traditionally "cosy" in tone, the setting is perfectly so, with it's particularly cloying "smalltown-ness". Perhaps that's not surprising, as all through this long series Gregor never seems like a regular PI either, even as he does all the traditional things. Actually, Gregor seems a bit of an afterthought here; we do mainly see things through his eyes but he never seems to be a part of what's happening, he's just The Recorder. While Ms. Haddam does manage to weave a story of growth and hope using her oldest, most comfortable character, having another voice narrate might have made for a spectacular break from the past, pulling her even further away from the comfy-cosy boundaries than this wonderful amalgam has. But, perhaps that's the point - that it's sublimely difficult to leave your past behind.

Haddam does a superb job of layering plots and ideas, then connecting them all up. A minor quibble for me: she lets us begin to understand who killed whom and when about halfway through, all the while trying to keep us more interested in other people and things. A classic maneuver that mostly works, but underneath we know whodunit. And I was saddened, as intended, when this really hit home; kept hoping that there was one more trick coming at the end, but alas....

Plus Haddam smooths out a few too many edges, ties everything up beautifully neatly at the conclusion and for some reason this really irritated me. And yet, I'd have been terribly angry if she hadn't done so. Her writing is compelling, raising many questions that absolutely demanded answers. I *tore* through the book, desperate to find out what truly did happen that momentous summer of 1969 to, and with, Liz, all the while feeling cranky because the sweet neatness took a bit of the darkness away.

On one hand the ending satisfied me; on the other it disappointed just a tiny bit. Emotionally, she had her teeth bared, and dug away rather strongly in places, but never actually "savaged" anybody. By the end of the novel I wanted to see some of the characters ripped to absolutely bloody bits. Liz's big emotional scene at the end seemed a touch pastel compared to the feelings roused, although it was, upon reflection, true to the character and a wonderful tour-de-force in and of itself. Despite the lack of carnage in the scene, as I read it I heartily applauded how far Liz - and Haddam - had come. And, after thinking about it, realized that the extremely sharp emotional scalpel used by Haddam was sublimely effective. Neat. Deadly.

This is a complex and difficult look at highschool and small-town life, our perceptions of friends and enemies, and whether we ever manage to grow up and away from the tormented beings of so long ago into someone whole and truly beautiful. I may disagree with some of the choices the author made regarding the structure of her novel, but I can only admire the power and passion of her writing.

Kristi says

This has to be one of the most tedious books to get through I have ever read. The characters were very flat and one note and it took until the book was almost over for me to even care what happened. I only finished it

because I started it, would not seek out this author again.

Graeme Roberts says

An excruciating book, probably double the length it might have been with more disciplined writing and decent editing. Full of unnecessary detail and ponderous explanations. Never again, Jane Haddam. Some sections about Gregor Demarkian, his girlfriend, and his Armenian milieu in Philadelphia might appeal to regular Haddam readers but they left me mystified.

Joyce Lagow says

#18 in the Gregor Demarkian series.[return][return]I read this story shortly before there was a national (US) news story about a high school boy who was constantly harassed, physically, by school mates. He was beaten, jumped on at every turn; his life was made miserable. That is the subject of this well-written mystery novel: the cruel harassment of Elizabeth Toliver in high school by a clique of a half dozen girls, the popular crowd . . . The ultimately most horrid act was to nail Elizabeth, whom the clique had nicknamed Betsy Wetsy after a doll that would wet her diapers and have to be changed, inside a park outhouse with 22 snakes that the girls had put in there, knowing that Elizabeth was utterly phobic about snakes. Now an adult and a very successful author with a rock-star lover, Elizabeth is still phobic about snakes and still cowed, frightened of those same 6 females, all of whom stayed in the small town in which they'd grown up. Elizabeth is returning to her home town, Hollman, PA, for the first time in almost 30 years to deal with her senile mother and in classic fashion of abused people, she both wants to return and dreads what will happen, because she knows she still can not stand up to that clique.[return][return]What makes that night 30 years ago even more horrifying is that a young life guard was murdered near the outhouse in which Elizabeth was screaming and beating herself bloody in an attempt to get out; the murder was never solved.[return][return]Because relationships in the Demarkian world are never really straightforward, Gregor becomes involved in Elizabeth Toliver's life through the request of Jimmy Card, her lover; he wants Gregor to go to Hollman, investigate who is planting really vicious stories about Elizabeth in the National Enquirer as well as investigate the murder that is now 32 years old. Card and his lawyer are pretty sure who is planting the stories, but they need proof that will convince Elizabeth to act to cut off the flow and the resulting ugly publicity. Gregor is more intrigued by the murder and soon becomes convinced that that somehow is the key.[return][return]So, he travels to Hollman and naturally, more bodies show up. The first, however, is not that of a human being but of Elizabeth's mother's old dog, cruelly eviscerated. The dog is not the last, as we might expect. And the plot goes on from there.[return][return]Haddam seems far more interested in the characters in the former high school clique and their current lives and relationships, both to one another and to others in the town, than she really is in the mystery itself. As she points out in her introduction, this is the longest book she has written to date, and it is absorbed with exploring the reasons for and results of small town women, in particular, being frozen in time during their high school years which were their peak times. While the murder part is well done, the sociological part, if we can call it that, is outstanding. And as I mentioned in the beginning, fits right into today's headlines.[return][return]Making his appearance for the first but not the last time in the series is Mark, Elizabeth's bright, appealing teen-aged son. Haddam has two sons, and it's pleasant to speculate that she modeled Mark and Geoff on her own boys. Certainly the last names are entirely too similar to be coincidental.[return][return]For me, this is one of her finest books. She ties it all together brilliantly. There are places where she could have used some better editing, but these are few and do not detract from the story. Highly recommended.

Kelly says

Pretty good, not one of the better ones. Most of the characters were so unpleasant (even the ones we are supposed to like) that it was not an enjoyable read. Part of the problem was how everyone harps and harps on how much they hate the locale.

Sallie says

I knew I'd read this before, but I couldn't remember exactly whodunit. A much darker mystery than I've been reading of late, but boy oh boy does Haddam pull you into the story. I really Like Gregor and love it when he's home on Cavendish Street in Philly! I was also very glad to have Bennis join Gregor even if for only the last part of the story.

Oswego Public Library District says

Somebody Else's Music is the 18th book in Jane Haddam's Gregor Demarkian series. The now successful Liz Toliver is returning to her hometown of Hollman for the first time in thirty years. A hard decision to make as she was bullied and abused from kindergarten until high school, including one horrific night when her tormentors nailed her into an outhouse that was filled with snakes and a classmate was murdered right outside. Gregor Demarkian, a retired FBI agent, arrives in the small town of Hollman with Liz and her family just in time to investigate a shocking wave of vicious crime. A measured pace and a dark tone will help readers understand multiple points of view from Liz, Gregor, and the women who bullied Liz.

Content warning: violence towards women, violence towards animals, and language.

-Jaymie

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Cyd says

An excellent Gregor Demarkian mystery. I think it's better without the holiday theme angle.

Kyrie says

The story of a small town and high school clique thirty years later was pretty hard to believe. I know that was part of the tale, that people could still be that petty, narrow minded and vicious three decades later.

I wanted to finish the book. I set a goal of reading all the books in this series. Even after leaping ahead and

reading the last chapter, I had to force myself to finish it.

To be fair, about three quarters of the way through, it got much better.

Luann says

This was a pretty creepy murder mystery and I thought the characters were well developed - but I really struggled with the author's writing style. I don't like tangents that go on for a page and a half and really don't have anything to do with the story. The biggest reason I picked up this book was because of the retired FBI profiler that was one of the main characters - but he was truly disappointing to me. He seemed quite aloof and very unsure of himself most of the time - perhaps that's more true to real life, but for a main character in a story I want a strong, confident profiler - this guy seemed to "stumble" on to most of his discovery's of the crime.

However, the part of the story I found the most disturbing was the abused wife who saw holiness in her abusive, alcoholic husband - I understand that many abused women blame themselves for the beatings they receive but I didn't think they would see their monster of a husband as an angel sent from God. Very odd.

Ricki says

What happened back in high school to cause the most popular girls to hate Elizabeth Tolliver, or Betsy Betsy, as they called her from elementary school on? She hasn't returned to her old hometown in 20 years...and wouldn't be going back now if her mother wasn't very ill and decisions need to be made! I think this is one of the best books in the series....and I did not guess who the murderer actually was!

Barbara says

What a great read. I was sucked in and immensely interested in this mystery, even though it was very painful at times(for the heroine; and for me as I remember incidences from my teen years). Liz Tolliver grew up in a small town, Hollman, PA. The abuse and cruelty she endured from her classmates is almost beyond my imagination (at my age; I realize how cruel people can be). This is more than I ever endured as a teenager.

The hero, I'm sure, predates, such TV creations as Monk and the Mentalist, yet he has his 'idiosyncrasies' as well. An Armenian American, who grew up in an Armenian neighborhood in Philadelphia and still lives in the same neighborhood, he is a very intellect and very good investigator - a former FBI agent. However, he can be oddly out of touched and clueless at times. This seems to be because he gets wrapped up in his head and his thoughts. While this is an interesting quirk, I think it is being exploited too much - more so in TV show than in books.

What an intense book, but very satisfying as it progresses. I look forward to more, but in a way, I'm afraid I may get tired of the repeating hero after awhile. (I don't have a lot of patience, at the best of times - I'm afraid he may get to me after awhile; but I'm not sure.)

Sam says

This book is a study about popularity and how being bullied affects a person far beyond school. None of the characters are likable. Possibly to show how bullying behavior becomes “normal” and justified. This book was different from previous ones though I enjoyed being with Gregor, Bennis, and the Armenian neighborhood.
