The Preservationist

by Justin Kramon

About the Book

A page-turning psychological thriller from the “talented young” author of FINNY (*Boston Globe*)

To Sam Blount, meeting Julia is the best thing that has ever happened to him.

Working at the local college and unsuccessful in his previous relationships, he’d been feeling troubled about his approaching fortieth birthday, “a great beast of a birthday,” as he sees it, but being with Julia makes him feel young and hopeful. Julia Stilwell, a freshman trying to come to terms with a recent tragedy that has stripped her of her greatest talent, is flattered by Sam’s attention. But their relationship is tested by a shy young man with a secret, Marcus Broley, who is also infatuated with Julia.

Told in alternating points of view, THE PRESERVATIONIST is the riveting tale of Julia and Sam's relationship, which begins to unravel as the threat of violence approaches and Julia becomes less and less sure whom she can trust.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think Julia is initially attracted to Sam? What does this say about her personality? Do her reasons change over the course of the book?

2. The second chapter of the novel introduces us to Sam. The first paragraph of this chapter ends with the sentence, "Who didn't want to keep a good thing going as long as he could?" Why is Sam so interested in preserving things? What does this say about his motivations in the novel? What makes him act the way he does?

3. There is an epigraph to the novel from Banana Yoshimoto that reads, "Death isn't sad. What hurts is being drowned by these emotions." How do you feel this quote relates to the book? Each of the three main characters has experienced a major loss. How are their attitudes toward death and loss different and how are they the same? How do the themes of death and loss play out over the course of the novel?

4. When we're introduced to Marcus in chapter 13, we discover that Julia's similarity to a girl from his past causes him to experience a great deal of emotional turmoil. Do you think that Marcus's character was shaped by what happened with Tree? Or do you think he would have been the same person regardless?

5. We get glimpses into the family lives and childhoods of all three major characters? How would you characterize the different families we see? Would you say that the novel takes a certain view about family or its importance in people's adult lives?

6. Why do you think the author chooses to explore the thoughts of all three major characters? How would the book be different if it were told only from Julia's point of view? Or only Sam's? Or Marcus's?

7. Would you say that the novel offers an overall view of love? Or would you say that there isn't one singular view expressed?

8. What other thrillers and suspense novels or movies would you compare this book to? How is it similar to or different from other novels you've read in this genre?

Author Bio

Justin Kramon is the author of the novels FINNY (Random House, 2010) and THE PRESERVATIONIST (Pegasus, 2013). A graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he has published stories in *Glimmer Train*, *Story Quarterly*, *Boulevard*, *Fence*, *TriQuarterly*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and others. He has received honors from the Michener-Copernicus Society of America, BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES, the Hawthornden International Writers' Fellowship, and the Bogliasco Foundation. His website is www.justinkramon.com.

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Publication Date: September 15, 2014
Genres: Fiction, Psychological Suspense, Psychological Thriller, Suspense, Thriller
Paperback: 336 pages
Publisher: Pegasus
ISBN-10: 1605986151
ISBN-13: 9781605986159