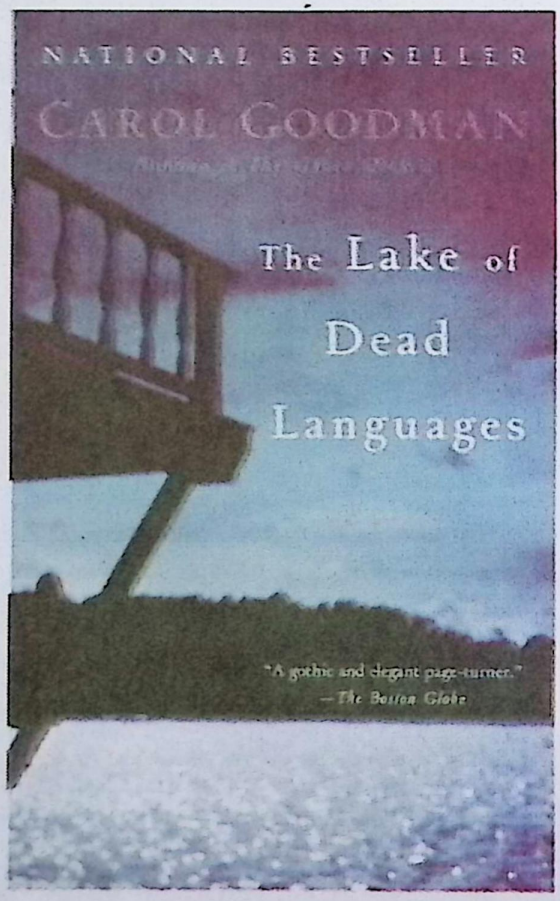
Lake of Dead Languages

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I've always prided myself on being a fast reader, if I may say so without sounding like Professor Slughorn (from Harry Potter 6). Friends who know me well try to gauge my reaction to a particular book by the speed at which I complete it. So when they saw me lugging around this particular paperback, they concluded that I must be loathing it. Surprisingly enough, the opposite was true in this case.



The story revolves around Jane Hudson, who used to be a student at Heart Lake School, and in her final year there, both her roommates, Lucy and Deirdre, committed suicide by drowning themselves in Heart Lake, which is the source of the school's name. The double tragedy is further compounded by a third death, where Lucy's brother Matt, for whom Jane had nursed a fierce crush, also follows his sister to her watery grave. Devastated by this loss, upon graduating, Jane vows never to return to the school again. The school's motto isn't cor te reducit (the heart leads you back) for nothing, though, because years later, Jane, now a single mother, finds herself back at the school as a Latin teacher, having to support her daughter Olivia.

Strange things start happening almost as soon as she arrives there, starting off with Jane's discovery of a page from her old journal, which she lost the very year the deaths had occurred. Other signs follow, all pointing back to the past Jane wants to forget, forcing her to remember, and thus we slowly begin to learn the truth of what really transpired all those years ago; and after one of Jane's own students turns up dead, seemingly a suicide victim, Jane realises that she herself had been unaware of many of the facts.

The first thing about this book that grips the reader is the beautiful use of language. Carol Goodman paints such a vivid and haunting picture, you can almost hear the rows of students sitting in the washroom, reciting their declensions, and you can almost see the girls with their scars and their dyed hair. It was this detailed and exquisitely touching play of words that made me want to slow down and absorb each image, each thought instead of rushing on to the end, even when the suspense and the tension were at their peak.

Goodman also takes time to explore the personality, and the psychology of her major characters, as though she herself was trying to understand what drove them to take the steps that they did, and it is an interesting, albeit slightly disturbing insight into the world of teenage girls, their obsessions, their need to belong, and more.

If there is any flaw in this book, it is with the plot. As long as Goodman stuck to unveiling the past, it was an unconventional, intriguing story, but when she brought in the new mysteries in the present time, it disintegrated, so to speak, into an RL Stine-ish whodunit. Not that there's anything wrong with Stine, but it was this development that took the book from a serious, psychological novel to chick-lit. Nevertheless, if it's entertainment you're looking for, this is the book for you!

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