



Poison Shy

Stacey Madden

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A dark debut from a rising literary talent Brandon Galloway is a 29-year-old nobody, fumbling between dead-end jobs in a town full of drunks and prostitutes. When he lands a position with a pest control company and meets 21-year-old wild-child Melanie Blaxley while fumigating her apartment for bed bugs, Brandon's life skips from hapless to hectic in no time. He is both attracted to and repelled by Melanie's vulgar sensuality and reckless promiscuity, but when her world of crazy sex and petty crime starts to take its toll on his sanity, Brandon wonders how much more of her he can stand. When she disappears, Brandon's left to put the pieces together. Is it all just a prank, or have Melanie's wild ways put her in peril? A hair-raising thrill ride through the bars and backstreets of a small college town, *Poison Shy* is a darkly funny and fast-paced novel about obsession, fear, and the threat of other people.

Poison Shy Details

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From Reader Review Poison Shy for online ebook

Janet Koops says

This is one of the best books I have read in a while. Brandon Galloway is unmotivated, unambitious and underachieving. He seems to be searching for something meaningful in life but isn't quite sure how to get it. Then he meets Melanie Blaxley while fumigating her apartment and his dull life is completely shaken up. As Brandon gets involved in more than he bargained for with Melanie's string of ex-lovers and reckless behaviour, Madden has you completely caught in the journey, and while you are screaming at Brandon to get out, you can also understand why he can't. While Madden's clean and simple prose weaves together this dark tale of life, love, family, and passion, he also leaves us in the light: Brandon Galloway emerges a hero and if Brandon can do it, then we all must have the potential to be a hero.

Mary says

I was a bit sceptical about this book when I first started it but I found that I was compelled to continue reading as the characters and the content kept me interested until the very last page. This is a story about a bug man who meets a girl, and gets dragged into her dysfunctional world. It is about how he copes with the dysfunction and makes it through the drama. The addition of his own dysfunctional family and assorted other characters rounds the story out and ties everything together in a nice neat package. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. I plan to donate my copy of this novel to the local library so that other people have the opportunity to enjoy this author.

Kari says

The premise of this one grabbed me from the start, and as soon as I was approved on Netgalley, I downloaded and started reading ASAP. And at the start, I was really into this one. There is something about Brandon's characterization, his mentality, etc, that totally drew me in. He is sort of ambitionless, just going with the flow even if he's not really happy with it. He's depressed, in a way that is obvious to readers but maybe not to him. He is, basically, trying to just figure his life out without totally screwing up. I connected to him and felt for him, and even when Melanie first starts coming into his life, when things really start up there, I was seriously captivated. But as things progressed, the book started to have a weird sort of feel for me, in a way that I can't accurately describe. We see big changes in Brandon, many of them not for the better, and Melanie is a seriously messed up girl. But some other stuff happens before this short book closes out that left me, in a way, feeling like what was the point? I didn't see quite the overall character arc for Brandon I would've liked, and that knocked this one down some for me. Still, there's something oddly intriguing about the whole ploy, and I still very much love Brandon's state of being.

Tobin Elliott says

This is a quirky novel. Not quite a romance, not quite a murder mystery and, completely opposite to what I

say most of the time, this is a novel that would have benefitted by being longer. Two plotlines (one with Bill, one with Darcy) would have been more impactful, the first with more lead-up, the second with some more fallout. But I must say, the characters were well-drawn, strange and an absolute pleasure to read. Just wish it hadn't ended so abruptly and that the protagonist actually did something.

Chrissy says

My worst fear? Insanity. All the different kinds of crazy.

Paranoid, psychotic, deranged.

Homicidal.

It's not so much being insane that scares me as the prolonged descent, degree by fractured degree, into the cavern of madness...

So begins, POISON SHY, the dark, gritty novel that tells the story of Brandon Galloway, a 29 year old in no-where's-ville USA who is learning to stay away from his own personal poison -- a wild, freckled red-head named Melanie, who he met one day when he was fumigating her apartment after a bedbug infestation. She blatantly screamed sexuality, she didn't wear a bra, and she was covered from head to toe in freckles -- and from that moment in her apartment, Brandon knew he couldn't get Melanie out of his mind.

Wandering through a series of dead-end jobs after the death of his man-whore father and the demise of his schizophrenic mother, Brandon is oddly attracted to Melanie's strange brand of sexuality and he finds himself becoming alarmingly obsessed with everything about her. After finding her at a bar and securing his first date with the elusive Melanie, Brandon finds himself spiraling down a tragic mess of sexually transmitted diseases, bar fights, lost job opportunities, aging prostitutes, petty thefts, and finally to an attempted murder....

Where is Melanie? And, what can Brandon do to slowly suck her poison from his aching veins?

I've read it a number of times in self-help books: we place the most trust in those who are most likely to deceive us. It's not that I believed or trusted Melanie about her feelings for me. As a matter of fact, I didn't trust her at all. My problem was that I wanted to...

POISON SHY is an amazingly witty, dark, humorous, contemporary novel that was remarkably well written and entertaining. It was a quick off-the-wall type read that was definitely resonate with anyone seeking out a good, dark tale of obsession, love, sex, disease, emotion, and insanity.

I almost gave it five stars, but I really love raccoons.

Chanda says

I got this book for free as part of the goodreads firstreads. I was hooked by the very first paragraph. I enjoyed the author's style of writing. I loved the plot and felt the book had a lot of potential! I gave it three stars, because it was such a short book 160 pages and I felt like the introduction took up a third of the book. Don't get me wrong, the author did a great job painting a picture of who Brandon was, giving his back story and getting me invested in Brandon as a character, but it made the rest of the book seem clipped.

Jenee Rager says

Definitely one of the more unique stories I have won from goodreads. The story is fast paced, and the author starts the story at the ending so you know what's going to happen but really not why, which is a style of story telling I have always enjoyed. I will say I was probably not the target audience for this book but still enjoyed it. I definitely think the style of writing, and the plot itself would appeal more to men than women, and hit especially hard in with the post college, pre middleage age bracket.

Talk Supe says

Full review at Talk Supe

I love SMadden's voice its sugar-free and tactless with succinct lamentations about life's misfortune, he had no qualms in creating real and human characters, people who pee, vomit, stink and shit for starters. You won't find romantic prose, long and winding rosy lines and dreams of HEA, just a swift punch in the gut that will disturb and grip you at the same time. No illusions of perfection here and he didn't try to romanticize the tragedies of life, POISON SHY plainly shows us that when people mess up, the effects are usually permanent and ugly. SMadden's debut is provocative in it's simplicity, it's one of those sorry illustrations that shit can happen to even the most innocent and unassuming guy, the only difference is POISON SHY was told in a very extraordinary way. As a reference, if you got a kick out of Crank by Ellen Hopkins, you'll definitely would want to read this one.

Laura says

This is a story of what can happen to you if you take a chance and walk on the wild side..all the things you just don't think REALLY happen to people..you find out that oh yes they do..but when you think about it..you still are not real sure HOW you got involved in the first place..and then..if you had the chance would you do the same things again...knowing what you do now? Interesting book....wild tangents.
I received this book from Goodreads.com.

Keithmerly S says

I was skeptical when I picked up this book. I thought, "Oh goody. Another boy turned into a man by a crazy takes-life-by-the-horn-crazed woman."

But this was anything unlike what I expected. It was more. I absolutely love this book. I cannot believe how much Stacy Madden packed into those 160 pages.

Brandon Galloway is a 29 year old unmotivated, unambitious, un-everything, nobody who is fumbling his way through life working a menial minimum wage job at a pest control company.

He then meets 21 year old beauty Melanie Blaxley while fumigating her apartment for bed bugs. And before you can say Kill 'Em All she disappears along with his sanity.

I recommend this book to anyone and everyone who enjoys a good non-stop-thrill-ride-good-read. Two thumbs up!!

Nadine says

Brandon is a 29-year-old guy who never quite found the ideal job and hopped from one occupation to another, right now he is an exterminator. When he is called to clear out the apartment of Melanie and her roommate of bedbugs he instantly falls for her. She is outgoing and pretty vulgar, quite the opposite of the very shy Brandon. Against all odds they become a couple and he is pulled into the world of sex and crime of her and her roommate.

This was an interesting read, I devoured it in one sitting. It is catchy, funny, observing, disgusting, dark, crazy, shocking... I was really drawn into the story which holds some surprises for the reader and really moves from a light start to a dark place. Towards the end the story twists into a direction I didn't see coming and which I found too sudden and unnecessary. Plus it felt like it was told too quickly and too anti-climatic.

The tone is direct, sometimes uncomfortably honest, which fits the story very well, the characters were great but although we learn very much about the past and childhood of Brandon, Melanie stays a mystery which works, but I am left curious about her background and what was going on inside of her. She is a fascinating character and I would have loved to learn more about her past and future.

This is surely no „nice book“ but a great read nonetheless, I will surely look out for upcoming books of this author.

(I received a free digital copy of this book via NetGalley.)

J. Kent Messum says

Poison Shy is a fast, fluid read that is anything but a typical little thriller. Set in a small town, Madden turns typical and not-so-typical folk into unlikely heroes and disturbing villains. Be forewarned, this book is not for the faint of heart or weak of stomach. If you like your reading on the dangerous side, then this is definitely a novel worth checking out. Get ready to have your boundaries pushed in some places.

Alice Bola says

This short novel is darkly disturbing and filled with sex, booze and violence. Our protagonist is 29-year-old Brandon Galloway who was born under a dark cloud. He lives a relatively lonely existence in a crappy job taking care of his bipolar mother. He has no hope, no future.

As a reluctant hero, Brandon was a great character. He was rough around the edges and complacent with his small existence. He was the shining star in the novel, unlike Melanie Blaxley. She was a very unlikable

character and one I had a hard time understanding. With such a great plot, I think this novel would have been elevated had Melanie been more kind. I understand she's supposed to be this "wild child," but there wasn't a clear understand of why Brandon was obsessed with her. I found it hard to believe he would take to Melanie as much as he did. As a reader, I didn't feel any attachment to her. When she went missing, I really didn't care and I couldn't believe Brandon cared either.

Honestly, I'm on the fence with this one. I hate to say that about any book because I know the author put her heart in it. This novel reads like a Young Adult novel although it is for adults. It's a bit elementary, although I think that works in its favor. Ms. Madden's greatest strengths are she write character dialog that is spot on and the plot is good as well. Overall, this novel was worth it because Brandon is a solid character.

Tammy says

4 1/2 stars!

In a word: An unexpectedly dark and bloody tale, filled with unlikable yet sympathy-inducing characters, an over-the-top plot and pitch perfect dialog.

I was not sure what to expect when I started reading *Poison Shy*, but it had some amazing blurbs on the back of the book, and I was looking forward to seeing if they were true. I'm thrilled to say those blurbs are spot on, and I spent a thoroughly enjoyable four hours inhaling it on the drive back from my vacation a few days ago. Madden's writing is spare and to the point, and his dialog is snappy and realistic, and fits the tone of this all too brief story perfectly.

The story is told from Brandon Galloway's point of view, a twenty-nine year old unmotivated and directionless man who can't seem to escape the dreary small Canadian town of Fraynes. He's just started working for an extermination company called Kill 'Em All and is simply happy to have a regular job. But one day his uneventful life comes unhinged when he and co-worker Chad get a call to rid an apartment of bed bugs. There he meets the beautiful but unsettling Melanie and her unstable roommate Darcy. Brandon is instantly attracted to the sexually alluring Melanie, but his low self-esteem prevents him from asking her out. So he does the next best thing: he begins to stalk her. After an "accidental" encounter at her college library, he snags a date with her, and that's when the real trouble starts.

As they begin an awkward relationship, the aggressively overprotective Darcy manages to thwart Brandon's every plan to spend time with Melanie, and with the help of lots of booze and just plain bad luck, Brandon's life is about to sink further into the toilet than it already is.

If you're looking for lovable characters, then *Poison Shy* probably isn't the book for you. Madden takes the idea of character flaws to a whole new level. Melanie in particular is brash and at times disgusting, and she tends to act like one of the boys whenever she's hanging out with Darcy. She sleeps around, drinks a lot, and is a truly annoying character. I found it hard to believe that Brandon could be attracted to her at all. Yet Melanie has something that makes Brandon keep coming back for more, despite a very scary roommate who threatens to beat him up. Finally, at the end of the book, Madden paints Melanie in a whole new light, one that makes the reader sympathize with her, if only for a brief moment.

Brandon himself is a typical loser-type, which made me like him from the start. And let's face it, he's got a

lot on his plate. His aging mother is a religious fanatic who is slowly losing her mind. His new job as an exterminator exposes him to poisonous chemicals on a daily basis, and his odd relationship with Melanie and Darcy isn't proving to be healthy either. But even though he lets Melanie walk all over him, you can see him change as the story progresses. The Brandon at the end of the book is a guy that isn't going to take shit from anyone, anymore.

Despite the violence and generally raunchiness, *Poison Shy* has its poignant moments. I especially loved the scenes between Brandon and his mother, a sad woman who carries around an unwashed security blanket. You can tell Brandon loves her even as she's losing her mind.

Madden's over-the-top plot starts out almost pedestrian, as Brandon tries to settle into a new job, make new friends, and get closer to the beautiful Melanie. But as one thing leads to another, his life begins to spiral out of control, and quickly. The author implies on page two that the story isn't going to end well, and so the reader expects the violent parts of the story. I especially loved the details that give the story the extra layer that I'm always looking for. For example, Brandon has a baseball bat from his childhood that he's named Red Hot, and it has its own back-story. The bat, which starts out as a sentimental object, figures into some of the dark action at the end. After all, if you're going to show the audience the gun in Act 1, you damn well better use it by Act 3. Well done, Mr. Madden!

Much of the book centers around a local pub called The Bloody Paw, a seedy joint with gruesome photos of dead or injured animals on its walls. It works as a framework for the story, since many significant events happen there, including a worrisome relationship between Melanie and the owner of the bar, a man name Viktor Lozowsky. Though I won't tell you how things wrap up, a shockingly violent scene near the end caught me off guard. But after thinking it over, I realized it was perfectly suited for this crazy story about how one's life can go swiftly downhill if you meet and associate with the wrong types of people.

My only worry about this book is that I think it's priced too high. Amazon charges \$9.99 for the digital version, and the slim (only 160 pages) paperback has a whopping \$18.95 list price. The publisher (who is Canadian, and that may factor into the cost) does a bang-up production job—it's a high quality book in every way—but I'm not sure your average reader is going to want to pay so much.

But I hope you do! *Poison Shy* was a happy surprise, and Stacey Madden has an awesome future as a writer, in my opinion. Like a horrible accident scene caught in the glare of an oncoming car's headlight, *Poison Shy* is an inescapable, in-your-face look at the tawdry lives of ordinary people.

Many thanks to the author for supplying a review copy.

This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy.

Rose says

Initial reaction: I have many words to spare on the content and portrayal of this book, but it wasn't what I thought it would be at all. I went into "Poison Shy" with the idea that it might be a decent murder/disappearance mystery, even with maybe some tough depictions here and there, but not on the level of the mediocre plotting and over the top shock effects that were in the duration of the book.

At this point in time, I'm the only one giving this a single star as far as the ratings go on multiple review

sites. It really wasn't worth the read and certainly not worth the price it's noted for on E-book or the paperback.

Full review:

I'm a little glad I waited a night to write a review for this particular novel because I think it would've sounded more heated if I had written one right on the heels of finishing it. I think I understand that Stacey Madden's sort of going for the shock jock writing style that I've seen in authors like Chuck Wendig and Scott Sigler, where there's much material that pushes the envelope for people. I went into it thinking that this would be a decent murder/mystery/suspense/thriller novel with some elements of sex and violence that would be like a pulp noir novel, but I wasn't expecting this harried, offensive mess. No plot, no humor, no likable characters, and certainly no kind of directive, everything was just shock for the sake of fantastical glorification and I wanted to julienne this book regardless of it being a digital copy. It does so many things wrong, it's hard to know where to begin.

I suppose it's best to start with the 29 year old protagonist Brandon Galloway - an exterminator who isn't quite right in terms of his particular background. In the beginning, he makes it clear to the reader that he was involved in a murder disappearance of two women from the town he used to reside/work in and the novel then goes on to explain his background and interactions with these women. Much of this information is told to the reader, going back as far as his childhood to adulthood days, and while it was an easy read, it really didn't make me feel all that much for the character - it felt too clinical, detached, and cliched. Still, considering I was flying through the prose, I kept going. I figured this would be a dark story, with the protagonist being a bit of a hapless detective hero (possibly?). But then when I came to the actual story, I had to step back.

Am I really the only person who thought this book was a piece of fantastical, non-funny, sick crap? Really? I can take very dark humor, I can even take some frank situations, I've read my share of pulp noir, but this book just didn't do any of what it set out to do well. There's no story here or cohesiveness, and the book is just flat out offensive for the sake of being offensive in a glorified way - misogynistic, slut-shaming, gay bashing, ableist slamming, and an utter offense in portraying women, sex (including a man who broke into an apartment to enact a "rape" in order to scare a female character but noted he actually "wasn't going to rape her, just scare her"), among other things. And it throws all that in with no story, no true mystery, no true stakes, and no resolution. There was no humor or true psychological depth to this, just a haphazard, passive male lead going from one plot event to another and not even having an ounce of realism to it. It really didn't have an ending, and the characters didn't have an ounce of likability. I couldn't even believe that after Melanie enacts a sexual encounter while the MC was half-sleeping involving her period blood, and he learns he contracted an STI from her, that he goes on to still sleep with her, despite him being freaked out.

I just...no. Just no. I don't think there's enough brain bleach to wipe the memory of some of these scenes in the book for me. It's a short read (under two hundred pages), but after a time, it just became a chore to read not only for the glorified shock elements, but the lack of a comprehensive plot. I was so glad to be done with this book.

I wouldn't recommend it. I wouldn't even recommend it knowing that it's priced at \$9.99 for the e-book/Kindle copy, and \$17.95 (variable) for the paperback. It's not worth the money. There are other decent thriller, dark humored, pulp mystery/suspense books out there. This just wants to be seen/shocking for the sake of being seen/shocking and it is not cool.

Overall score: 0.5/5

Note: I received this as an ARC from NetGalley, from the publisher ECW Press.
