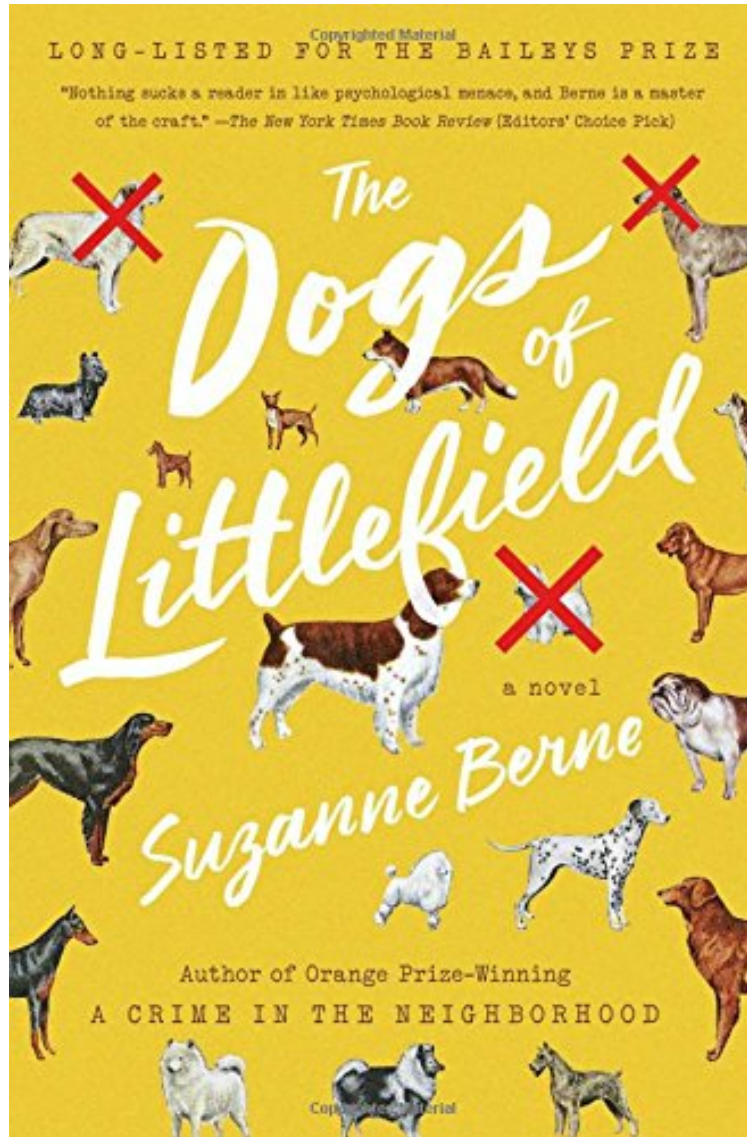


[Free pdf] The Dogs of Littlefield: A Novel

The Dogs of Littlefield: A Novel

Suzanne Berne

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Suzanne Berne : The Dogs of Littlefield: A Novel before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Dogs of Littlefield: A Novel:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. I'd give this 4.9863 stars By Customer I'd give this 4.98673 stars (so just nibble a little off of one of the star corners). This a wonderful, compelling view of the sociology operative in upper-class, affluent suburbia. In a way, it supports the concept of a "happistat." One has an intrinsic happiness level that is not really influenced by good or bad events or situations. And worriers tend to gravitate (maybe) to affluent

suburbs. It's a truly great read. My only quibble is the rather abrupt ending, which is short and very unsatisfying, as if the author had to finish it up in a hurry for a deadline, in maybe an hour. After the wonderful body of the book, it's a little disappointing. Luckily, despite what it seems to be initially, it's really not a mystery. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Annoyed I wasted time finishing this book
By patricia steele
Very well written but SO boring and indulgent. Ironic since the theme of the book seems to be skewering the boring and indulgent middle class characters. If this was deliberate, I suppose it's a clever device, but does not make for good reading. Would have made a few excellent short stories, but it's no novel. JK Rowlings did a much better job of this in *A Casual Vacancy*. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Some excellent moments
By R. Glynn
The book was quite enjoyable, although I wish the humor had been more sustained. I was not disappointed at book's end.

From the Orange Prize–winning author of *A Crime in the Neighborhood*, Suzanne Berne's *The Dogs of Littlefield* is “sublime” (*The Chicago Tribune*), a suspenseful and hilarious “suburban comedy of manners par excellence” (*Kirkus Reviews*) that explores the unease behind the manicured lawns of suburban America. Littlefield, Massachusetts, named one of the Twenty Best Places to Live in America, is full of psychologists and college professors, proud of its fine schools, its girls' soccer teams, its leafy streets, and quaint village center. Yet when sociologist Dr. Clarice Watkins arrived in Littlefield to study the elements of “good quality of life” someone begins poisoning the town's dogs. Are the poisonings in protest to an off-leash proposal for Baldwin Park—the subject of much town debate—or the sign of a far deeper disorder? “Nothing sucks a reader in like psychological menace, and Suzanne Berne is a master of the craft.... Her scenes are elegantly composed, and even throwaway characters jump off the page” (*The New York Times*). A wry exploration of the discontent concealed behind the manicured lawns and picket fences of darkest suburbia, *The Dogs of Littlefield* explodes with “comic exuberance and restrained beauty” (*The Boston Globe*).

“Berne (*Missing Lucile*, 2010, etc.), who won the Orange Prize for her first novel, *A Crime in the Neighborhood* (1997), is a sure hand at the dinner parties, school concerts, teacup tempests, and true moments of suspense that make a suburban comedy of manners par excellence. It's too bad about the dogs, but they died for a good cause.”—*Kirkus* (Starred) “A compelling, poignant yet unsentimental novel that examines life, love and loss. Original and brilliant” —*Sunday Mirror* “Nuanced, thoroughly enjoyable, excellent” —*Guardian* “Very well -written, devastating and funny ... insightful, too. Highly recommended” —*Daily Mail* “Brilliantly done. Gentle and often moving” —*Sunday Times* “Well-observed shrewd satire ... sharp, funny and painful. Berne takes the domestic and turns it into the majestic” —*Sunday Telegraph* “Her unique voice comes through in the combination of a forensic approach to her characters' foibles and lyrical descriptions of the changing of the seasons in New England. This is an apparently light tale but there are dark shadows in *Littlefield* too. Berne's novel is both absorbing and amusing, and lingers in the memory.”—*The Independent (UK)* “A look at suburban life that manages to be both scathing and sympathetic, Berne's latest is a smart, amusing satire.”—*Booklist*
About the Author
Suzanne Berne is the author of the novels *The Dogs of Littlefield*, *A Crime in the Neighborhood*, *A Perfect Arrangement*, and *The Ghost at the Table*, as well as *Missing Lucile: Memories of the Grandmother I Never Knew*, part biography and part memoir. She has taught at Harvard University and at Wellesley College. Currently she teaches creative writing at Boston College and is on the MFA faculty of the Ranier Writing Workshop. She lives outside of Boston with her husband. They have two daughters.
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The Dogs of Littlefield 1. No one was very surprised when the signs began appearing in Baldwin Park. For years people had been letting their dogs run free in the meadow to the west of the elementary school without attracting much notice; but once an authorized off-leash “dog park” was proposed and a petition presented to the Littlefield Board of Aldermen, fierce arguments erupted over whose rights to the park should be upheld, and the town broke into factions: those who loved dogs and those who did not, at least not in the park. At first the signs were polite reminders to dog owners to curb and pick up after their dogs. PLEASE RESPECT THE PARK, they read. Or THE PARK IS FOR ALL OF US. But as the off-leash proposal gained support among the aldermen, several of whom owned dogs themselves, the signs became more pointed. On St. Patrick's Day, a sign was posted on a telephone pole at the frontier of the elementary school playground where wood chips gave way to grass and dog-walking parents often congregated after escorting their children to school. Printed in blue ink on the kind of thin, flexible cardboard that comes slipped inside of men's dress shirts, it read: Pick up after Your Dog. Aren't You Ashamed that You Don't? This sign created a small uproar among the parents, who objected to its tone, and it was taken down by the custodian. Then, on March 21, according to the “Crime Watch” column in the *Littlefield Gazette*, an unidentified man threatened to shoot an unleashed dog for colliding with his bicycle while he was riding in the park; the dog owner reported this threat to the police. The man had dark facial hair, “scruffy” was her actual term, and was between eighteen and twenty-five years of age. A description, she acknowledged, that fit half the young men in Littlefield. Not long after the collision between dog and cyclist, another sign appeared overnight on a telephone pole, this one at the eastern edge of the park, bordering Endicott Road. On the back of a brown paper shopping bag, in large crude black letters, was written: Leash Your Beast Or Else It was also quickly taken down, though not before being seen by two gardeners, several dog walkers, and a woman out jogging. — — A week later the aldermen voted to

postpone discussions of the dog park proposal until an independent task force could conduct a site review, and for a while the controversy quieted. Soccer season resumed in mid-April, and once again whole families sat together in the park, wearing sweaters and baseball hats and fleece lap blankets against the chilly morning air, cheering from folding nylon chairs on the sidelines, mist rising from the grass at their feet, some holding dogs tightly on leashes while children flew back and forth across the damp green field, hair backlit by the low morning sun. On weekend afternoons as the weather warmed, families strolled down Brooks Street with ice-cream cones from the Dairy Barn. Soft-hipped mothers wearing large dark sunglasses stopped to exchange greetings and to share mild mutinous jokes about driving to Manhattan one of these days instead of doing the three o'clock school pickup. Elderly women from Avalon Towers wandered past in turtlenecks and boiled-wool jackets and elasticwaisted slacks, holding on to each other's thin arms, shaking their heads at flocks of flamingo-like girls, clad in black leggings and oversize hooded sweatshirts, texting each other in front of Walgreens. Now and then the trolley rumbled to a stop at the old fieldstone station. People stepped onto or off the platform, and then the trolley rumbled on again. Almost always a dog was tied by its leash to a parking meter outside the Dairy Barn or the Bake Shoppe or the Tavern, looking hopefully at passersby, or cringingly, or indifferently, but as much a part of those busy village afternoons as anybody else. Spring turned to summer. Families went away on vacations to the Cape or Maine or Martha's Vineyard, taking their dogs with them or boarding them at kennels. The park was quiet and hot and smelled of mown grass and car exhaust. Gardeners in sun hats and rubber clogs worked in the community gardens; young parents who could not afford to go on vacation pushed strollers to the elementary school playground and then across the soccer field and into the park for a picnic or to nap on a blanket under the big spreading maple tree that stood alone in the bowl-like meadow. In the background floated the oceanic roar of the Massachusetts Turnpike. No new signs about dogs were posted; the old polite ones faded in the sun and eventually were torn down or blew away. In September, just after school was back in session and the evenings were turning cool, the aldermen voted to grant a three-month trial period to dog park proponents. The meadow of Baldwin Park would be "off-leash" between 8:00 A.M. and 10:00 A.M. on weekdays, and for two hours on Saturday and Sunday evenings. If all went well, these hours would be expanded. An editorial in favor of the dog park appeared the next day in the Gazette, pointing out that Littlefield had historically embraced freethinking. Community gardens occupied half an acre of Baldwin Park; Clean Up Littlefield Day was an institution, as was Celebrate Your Heritage Day (twenty-two different countries with tables last year in the elementary school gym), and for the past six years the high school had celebrated Gay Pride Day with speeches and banners. Let us not be guided by visions of what could go wrong, wrote the editorialist, but by what could go right. Certainly we are tolerant enough of our fellow creatures to designate an off-leash area in Baldwin Park. That same morning, a woman named Margaret Downing drove her dog, Binx, into town for a walk in the meadow. On her way to the park she stopped at Whole Foods to pick up a loaf of bread for dinner, parking near the store entrance, where a bearded young man in a yellow T-shirt stood with a clipboard, shaking a ballpoint pen that appeared to be running out of ink. Canvassers often hovered outside the glass doors, and Margaret made a point of signing their petitions for Green Alliance initiatives or to ban plastic bags, though usually she declined requests for donations. She contributed online to three charitable organizations and was trying to keep an eye on which ones did what with the money. But after being asked twice this morning for a donation to Friends of the Earth, she did offer the canvasser a pen from her bag. He was thin, morose, dark, and foreign-looking in his yellow T-shirt, and was being avoided by other shoppers. "Here's to a better world," she said, handing him the pen. He frowned as if she'd made an off-color remark and took the pen without thanking her. Walking quickly to her car, she passed a small, portly black woman in an orange turban; normally Margaret would have made an effort to smile at the woman, even more out of place in the Whole Foods parking lot than the canvasser, but she kept her head down, feeling his eyes on her still as she climbed into her Volvo station wagon, the back window decorated with Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club decals. Had he thought she was being snide? She was glad to find she had the park all to herself; by ten o'clock the dog owners and professional dog walkers who visited each morning had come and gone. Against a taut blue sky the heavy crowns of oaks and maples were dark green, interrupted here and there by a few gold leaves. Her dog was a black Lab, still a puppy at ten months old, a big, handsome, sleek animal, already almost sixty pounds. She didn't often let him off his leash; despite months of puppy kindergarten, he didn't come when she called, he rolled in dead things, and he jumped into any kind of water. You accept certain responsibilities, the breeder had told her, when you have a large dog, and one of them is simply holding on to it. But the day was so lovely, and he was whining and pulling hard, dragging her across the grass, making the gagging noises dogs make when they lunge against their collars. Sometimes a dog just needs to run away with itself, she thought—an unruly idea that might not have occurred to her had she not been brooding about the incident in the parking lot. She'd only meant to be encouraging. Why was even the simplest gesture so complicated? You worry about everything, Julia was always telling her. "Oh, for God's sake, Binx." She bent down and unclipped the leash from his collar, watching as he shot across the meadow, immediately realizing her mistake. He ran toward the woods, divided from the rest of the park by a shallow creek where primordial-looking skunk cabbages flourished greenly in black mud along with clusters of poison ivy, just turning scarlet. Ignoring Margaret's cries, he leapt into the creek and wallowed for a few moments before clambering out of the mud and up the opposite bank. Then he shook himself and galloped toward where the

pine trees cast jagged shadows onto the bright grass. But instead of running into the woods he stopped to nose a boulder under a tall clump of sumac, his back legs muddy and gleaming. Margaret hurried over the little wooden footbridge, calling his name, knowing that she would have to catch him by the collar and haul him away from whatever he had found. The sun was in her eyes, and at first she noticed only sumac, its stalks already turning the chalky lavender that comes to sumac in the fall. Underneath was not a boulder but something enormous and pale, its coat so short as to make it seem hairless. Teeth bared, huge furrowed face contorted in a snarl. Bloodied, yellowish foam had collected around the folds of its muzzle. A breeze brushed Margaret's forehead and stirred the tasseled grasses and a spray of goldenrod at the verge of the woods. From deep within the trees came the high igniting sounds of small birds. In a moment it would come to her what she was seeing and what she should do about it. But in the vast divide between one moment and the next, she could only stare at the creature, white and motionless, almost too big to be believable, the smooth skin of his underbelly spotted with wide pale freckles, so exposed, so tender-looking, so innocent and perverse.