



Say Nice Things About Detroit

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Twenty-five years after his high school graduation, David Halpert returns to a place that most people flee. But David is making his own escape—from his divorce and the death of his son. In Detroit, David learns about the double shooting of his high school girlfriend Natalie and her black half-brother, Dirk. As David becomes involved with Natalie's sister, he will discover that both he and his hometown have reasons to hope.

As compelling an urban portrait as *The Wire* and a touching love story, *Say Nice Things About Detroit* takes place in a racially polarized, economically collapsing city that doesn't seem like a place for rebirth. But as David tries to make sense of the mystery behind Natalie's death and puts back the pieces of his own life, he is forced to answer a simple question: if you want to go home again, what do you do if home is Detroit?

Say Nice Things About Detroit Details

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From Reader Review Say Nice Things About Detroit for online ebook

Mrtruscott says

3.25 stars. The Detroit setting attracted me to this book, which is about a man who swims against the tide and returns to his hometown (father asks, mother has dementia).

My Red Pen is supposed to be on hiatus, allowing me to read without “grading,” but...the opening aging mother/father plot was totally absent during much of this book, which caused me to wonder about my own memory problems.

I liked this book, despite some shortcomings. It seemed like it needed to be longer, which would've allowed the author to use his talents to develop the characters and their stories with more than broad brushstrokes.

I wouldn't say that I want a poorly written book to be longer. So...I give this fairly forgettable novel faint praise.

Caryn says

As an auto-industry and Detroit refugee who now lives in Denver, this book was an absolute must-read.

I have a friend whose annual gift to me is a trip to someplace in Detroit -- Belle Isle, Greektown, a Tiger Game, or even just an coney island hot dog from Lafayette Street. My friend loves Detroit, and always helps me see the beauty in this old and ravaged city..

And even though, I won't be migrating back any time soon, it was gratifying to see the city again through fresh eyes. Lasser has done a wonderful job bringing the complexity of the City to a place that is hopeful. He doesn't gloss over or deny the difficulties (economic armagedon, racial divides) -- but his characters are not defeated by them either.

After reading this book, it's easier to refer to Detroit as 'home' -- something I've fought against for years.

Patti says

Whoa, this book really took me all around the Detroit area, including near to the suburban areas I grew up and lived it. Street by street, names of places that are both still there or now gone. Wow. The story was pretty good too. "Say Nice Things About Detroit" was a quote by Detroit resident Emily Gail, and it was also a sign on the side of a building downtown: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/detroiti...>

This is about 2 childhood friends who reunite as family issues bring them both back to Detroit. As they become romantically involved, both decide to move back to the Detroit area, one into Detroit itself (not common among white suburbanites).

Speaking as a Detroiter (how most of us think of ourselves, wherever we grew up in the Detroit metropolitan area) who lives in Tucson, AZ now, this book really brings to life why people stay in Detroit, and why people return.

Recommended.

Stephanie W says

As someone also writing about Detroit and its suburbs, I felt I had to read **SAY NICE THINGS ABOUT DETROIT**. Lasser certainly knows his setting, and I loved the idea of these characters returning home after tragedy befalls them in more idyllic locales (Denver, Los Angeles). Lasser also shines light on the ongoing racial tension in the city; there is a black Detroit and a white (suburban) Detroit, and the two worlds rarely intersect. What gives weight and momentum to the novel are Lasser's characters as they tread this boundary, with varying results. One character, Dirk, walks this tightrope his whole life: he has a white mother and black father, and as an adult works undercover for the FBI. For him, having a dual identity is more than just part of the job.

While I enjoyed the book, the prose sometimes fell flat, and the "in" references to Detroit, as well as some of the dialogue, felt too heavy-handed. Places and landmarks are named frequently, lest we forget where this book takes place: the People Mover, Greektown, the Ren Cen. When David, one of the main characters, invites his neighbor to a game at Tiger Stadium, he's reminded that it's "Comerica Park" now. It's a reminder the reader doesn't need, as a few chapters earlier, David helps a young man open an account at Comerica, "the bank that had naming rights to the new ballpark." (This is paraphrase, not a direct quote.) Then there's a moment at the end of the book, once David (white) has been living in a predominantly black neighborhood for a few months when he's questioned (for the umpteenth time) what he's doing living there. His (black) neighbor, the one who accompanied him to the Tigers' game, steps in, saying, "He belongs here." It was a bit of a cringe-worthy moment, I felt--an overstatement of a man "earning" his place in his neighborhood. Still, I'd recommend the book, to native Detroiters and to those curious about this much-maligned city. Detroit does need more people saying nice things, and I'm glad Lasser is one of them.

In the interest of social commentary, I found it telling that while Lasser's characters manage to find their homes in Detroit, he still lives out West. This is not a critique--I myself have made my home far away from the Motor City--but it makes me wonder if finding happiness in Detroit is still the stuff of fiction.

Mike Tueros says

A quick read, and with roots in hometown nostalgia, I would probably have given this book 3 1/2 stars if possible. Lasser weaves a story about David Halpert, a Denver lawyer who is pulled back to his hometown of Detroit to help his father with his mother, who suffers from Alzheimer's. That's a lot in and of itself, but to pile on top of it, Halpert is divorced and his son was killed in an auto accident a few years prior...wait, not done yet. He gets involved with his high school girlfriend's sister, who is married with a child in L.A., but also visiting Detroit as her sister and half brother (mixed race from two different fathers) have been murdered. While I enjoyed the local references to my hometown, the plot lines and continuity of the story left me shaking my head; Lasser complicated the story in an attempt to get across why someone would move back to Detroit - ad nauseum. I overall enjoyed the story, plot lines notwithstanding and recommend if you're

from the Detroit area and want to read a little of your hometown.

Peebee says

I liked this book a lot more than most other readers, it seems. I spent four years in Michigan, and while I never lived in Detroit, I did spend time there and many of my friends were Detroit-area natives. So it felt very familiar to me. So much so that I briefly had this insane fantasy of buying an extremely inexpensive house -- for cash or something close to it -- and spending some time there. Unlikely it will happen but it's no crazier than some other ideas that have crossed my mind in the last several years. I could relate to all the characters in the book, except perhaps for Marlon (which is part of the problem, I guess). I did find some of the back-and-forth between different time frames confusing....while the story didn't have to be told in a completely linear and chronological fashion, I do think it skipped around a little too much. It was a quick read and no denser than it needed to be to tell its story. Can't wait to read some more Scott Lasser....

Betsy says

White upper-middle class guy returns to Detroit - the "real" Detroit below 8 mile road, not the suburban Detroit to the north where he grew up - and has adventures, good and bad, with black people. That's the gist of this novel by someone who went to my suburban Detroit prep school - and I don't fault him for trying or for implying, if not outright saying, that there are nice things about Detroit. But the writing was a bit blunt and the novel plot-heavy, jerking from one character to the next, one era to the next. Still, I had fun - as expected - reading about places I could clearly envision from my lost youth, such as Lone Pine Road in Bloomfield Hills, the Varsity Shop in Birmingham, and Palmer Hills (where I used to go twice a week to get allergy shots at my pediatrician's office nearby). There was even a mention of getting some Tigers tickets from one of the owner Mike Ilitch's kids - maybe it was the kid I sang in a Madrigal choir with in,um, 1977.

Erin says

I had to put this book down and walk away. I had high hopes for this book, being a Detroit area resident (I won't lie, I don't live within the city, but south of it.). Growing up, Detroit is the big city, the city my parent's used to go to, the one I started exploring when I got old enough to drive myself there, where I frequent now. It is the city my grandfather used to drive my four year old brother around, showing him the sights, especially Belle Isle. My husband is from the actual city, and his family still lives there, and I visit them as well, and know some of the neighborhoods. A few of my friends are also real Detroit residents, as is my stepsister. I grew up with the horror stories about Detroit and the good stories too.

So I had expectations of this book, because of the title. However, the book was so downtrodden, depressing, nothing good could happen. Nothing good was happening. 13 year olds on drugs, steel workers with cancer, infidelity, dementia to name a few character storylines. The title itself seems to come from a tshirt someone in the book was wearing - a guy holding a gun to the head of a puppy, and the writing was "Say Nice Things About Detroit", the implication being if you didn't he would kill the puppy. I just felt it perpetuated the beliefs about Detroit, focused only on the bad. The violence and despair. I was really hoping for a fresh take on the city, and I didn't get it.

Since I didn't finish, maybe the book ended with a positive spin on Detroit. I don't know. But from what I read, it's just another slam on the city. I don't believe Detroit is all bad, but like all cities, it has its ups and downs. Maybe I will give it another shot in the future, but as it stands now, I don't need to. I could be a jerk, expecting roses at the start, but I think I needed it to continue. If there ever is anything good anyway, that is.

Lora says

Still grieving over the death of his son, lawyer David Halpert decides to move back to Detroit from Denver to help his father as his mother descends into dementia. His decision coincides with the murder of his high school girlfriend, Natalie, and her African-American half brother, Dirk, who was an FBI agent. David connects with Natalie's younger sister, Carolyn, who's come back to Detroit because of the tragedy. They start seeing each other, even though Carolyn is married and lives in Los Angeles. With the murders unsolved, David and Carolyn have no idea that their connections to Natalie and Dirk might be dangerous. In the novel, Lasser has written a character-centered story that is quick-moving, yet explores the themes of loss and racism within the backdrop of an evolving Detroit. I really enjoyed the book and it reminds me of the writing of Stewart O'Nan.

Tony says

I'm usually pretty generous when it comes to fiction that's explicitly trying to evoke a city, especially if that city isn't New York. Unfortunately, this sappy love letter to Detroit just goes way too far in trying to resuscitate the city, and along the way invokes race in a way that is highly suspect. The plot revolves around David a 40-something lawyer who grew up outside Detroit, but has been living in Denver for the last twenty years or so. His mother's sliding into dementia, and his father asks him to come home for a visit. When doing so, he learns of the recent murder of his high-school girlfriend and her half-brother and meets up with her younger sister.

It doesn't take much prodding for him to ditch Colorado to try and make a fresh start in Detroit, especially since he's fleeing his own demons, which include the death of his son and the subsequent end of his marriage. Quick as a blink, he's trading his Audi in for an American-made car, buying a historic house in a black neighborhood, wooing his former girlfriend's sister, and helping out the wayward nephew of the dead half-brother. I'm not quite sure I've come across a redemption story that's trying to hit so many different targets at the same time, and the effect is cloying and false.

Make no mistake, David is not redeeming himself so much as rescuing others in blatant ways. He's rescuing his father from loneliness, the sister from a dead marriage, the nephew from his poor past choices (and the thugs after him), the dead half-brother's mother from her unsalable house, and on and on. It all starts to feel like the David fantasy hour, and nowhere is it more of a fantasy than the depiction of gentrification -- or to be precise, a white fantasy. Over and over, his choice to buy a home in a black neighborhood is questioned by everyone he meets, allowing him to occupy the virtuous colorblind moral high ground. The house even comes with a built in fantasy neighbor - a retired judge (picture a Field of Dreams era James Earl Jones) who accepts him and invites him over for dinner, goes to a Tigers game with him, etc.

After I finished it, I checked out some of the media reviews and was shocked at how much praise it's gotten. Don't get me wrong, it's nicely paced and moves right along, and there's plenty of nice Detroit-specific detail,

but the whole thing has the feel of a middle-age white divorcee's Hallmark movie. If you want an undemanding romantic story, this is a nice short one, but if you want the great Detroit fictional experience, stick with Middlesex or Elmore Leonard's Detroit-set crime capers.

Larry H says

Yes, you can go home again. But do you want to? Scott Lasser's new novel, *Say Nice Things about Detroit*, strives to answer those questions.

David Halpert hasn't really been back to his hometown of Detroit in more than 25 years. Most people flee that city and never come back, but trying to recover from a divorce and the death of his son, and help his father with his ailing mother, David decides to return. Shortly thereafter, he learns about the murder of his high school girlfriend, Natalie, and her half-brother, Dirk, who was an FBI agent.

Reconnecting with Natalie's family, he finds they are dealing with their own pain, and he begins a relationship with her younger sister, Carolyn, who is visiting from California to help her mother through her grief. Carolyn is pondering an escape from her own marriage, and as her relationship with David grows in intensity, she, too, considers moving back to Detroit, but wonders what effect it might have on her young son. And what does moving from Los Angeles back to a declining Detroit really mean for her life?

At the same time as the book focuses on David and Carolyn's relationship against the backdrop of their struggling hometown, it also flashes back to key points in Dirk's relationship with his close friend, Everett, and Everett's son, Marlon, whose troubled life also intersects with David and Carolyn's.

Scott Lasser is a very good writer, and he has created a very compelling and interesting story. I had a feeling of inevitability as I was reading the book, and I hoped that the plot wouldn't unfold quite the way I feared it might. The characters are really complex, and while I understand that the flashbacks were necessary to underscore Dirk's relationship with his family and Marlon, I felt they were a little distracting to the flow of the story. But in the end, this is a powerful story of second chances, and believing yourself worthy of happiness.

Scotchneat says

David Halpert grew up in Detroit but left, like many others, for a better life. But when he returns home to help his father take care of his mother, he decides to stay for good and move back from Denver.

He finds out that his high school sweetheart and her half-brother, who happens to have been an FBI agent, and black, were gunned down a few days before. He gets in touch with her younger sister and they become involved.

This is a love story for the city of Detroit that nonetheless focused on its collapse, racial divides and lost innocence. More than once, David is asked why he wants to come back, and why he would buy a house in a black neighbourhood.

Might be ironic that the author, who also grew up in Detroit, does not live there now ;)

Akeiisa says

While this wasn't the suspenseful, tense novel I thought it would be, it was a nice character study focusing on what it means to start over when you think you've lost what matters. David is still recovering from the loss of his son, when his father asks him to come home to Detroit to help with his ailing mother. Carolyn has returned to Detroit following the murder of her sister and half-brother and finds herself confronting some hard truths. Marlon has lived his entire life in Detroit, made some bad choices, and has to make some tough choices. The lives of these three characters intersect in Detroit, a city in decline with a few glimmers of hope for a better future.

More of a 3.5 than a 4 given the misleading jacket description. Additionally, a well written and engrossing story, where I wanted just a little more than the light touch on the race and economic issues in Detroit.

Eric Walters says

I'm giving this three stars because I like the title, and the author does capture some of the essence of the Midwest and Detroit. I suppose the breakneck pace is ok. However, characters are thinly drawn stereotypes, particularly around issues of race. Without giving too much away, I think the climactic scene is impossible to believe, and the character's response to the trauma involved makes no sense at all. Am I really to believe that being held at gunpoint in her boyfriend's house, then seeing two men killed there, will make the upper-middle class pregnant white woman feel like this is her home, and she decides to stay, because she's fought for it? Some potential here, but in the end the unbelievable story is too unbelievable. Which is too bad, because I think the author makes some positive points that are lost in the chaos of some weak plot turns.

Rick says

Scott Lasser's novel is a quick and easy read perfect for an interminable flight from Newark to Charlotte. the book chronicles the ever popular cliche of the lost middle-aged white dude who finds love and happiness upon returning to inner city Detroit and builds a life with the adulterous sister of his former girlfriend who on page one has already been cutdown in a hail of gunfire with her black half brother. Coincidences I think not. Lasser writes better about Detroit then he does about people. With malevolent violent drug dealing murderers butting heads with a woman who leaves her boring husband and drags her teenage son from sunny California to snowy Detroit you better hope so. There is some clever writing but i would suggest you reach for Elmore Leonard or Daniel Woodrell(see my next review) first.
