



The Death of Sweet Mister: A Novel

By Daniel Woodrell

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The Death of Sweet Mister: A Novel By Daniel Woodrell

Shug Akins is a lonely, overweight thirteen-year-old boy. His mother, Glenda, is the one person who loves him--she calls him Sweet Mister and attempts to boost his confidence and give him hope for his future. Shuggie's purported father, Red, is a brutal man with a short fuse who mocks and despises the boy. Into this small-town Ozarks mix comes Jimmy Vin Pearce, with his shiny green T-bird and his smart city clothes. When he and Glenda begin a torrid affair, a series of violent events is inevitably set in motion. The outcome will break your heart.

"This is Daniel Woodrell's third book set in the Ozarks and, like the other two, *Give Us a Kiss* and *Tomato Red*, it peels back the layers from lives already made bare by poverty and petty crime." --Otto Penzler, "Penzler Pick, 2001"

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The Death of Sweet Mister: A Novel By Daniel Woodrell Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #640655 in Books
- Brand: Back Bay Books
- Published on: 2012-04-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x .75" w x 5.50" l, .41 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 208 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Penzler Pick, June 2001: This is Daniel Woodrell's third book set in the Ozarks and, like the other two, *Give Us a Kiss* and *Tomato Red*, it peels back the layers from lives already made bare by poverty and petty crime, exposing the reader to the raw everyday hopes and fears of the poor and the helpless.

Told through the voice of an overweight 13-year-old boy named Shuggy Atkins, this is the story of Shug; the one person who loves him, his mother Glenda; and her boyfriend Red, a brutal and ignorant man. Red hates Shug but uses him to break into houses to steal drugs and anything else that can be sold. Glenda makes a meager living looking after the local cemetery and spends her time trying to keep Red amused and away from Shug, whom he loves to humiliate but whom she adores. Glenda is Shug's only champion. She calls him Sweet Mister as she continually boosts his confidence and promises a better life for him, if not for herself.

But when Glenda sees a beautiful, green Thunderbird with leather seats and its driver, Jimmy Vin Pearce, a chain of events is set into motion that will end in violence and bloodshed. Glenda must keep hidden from Red her infatuation with Jimmy Vin's money and fine clothes while she and Shug dream separate dreams of making a new life away from the violence.

Woodrell writes books that are small in volume but large in scope. It is impossible to put down this story of less than 200 pages until the final tragedy unfolds. --*Otto Penzler*

From Publishers Weekly

Woodrell (*Tomato Red*) excels at depicting the seedy side of Southern living, and in this brooding coming-of-age tale he revisits the hardscrabble Ozarks town of West Table, Mo., his dark, insistently realist prose packing a visceral punch. Overweight 13-year-old Shuggie Atkins, sharp and cynical for his age, lives in a ramshackle house situated in a "bone yard" with his perpetually drunk and dreamy mother, Glenda, and his savage stepfather, Red. Despite Red's hot temper, Glenda's tendency to behave foolishly and Shuggie's frustrations, their lives settle into a rough-hewn rhythm: Red comes and goes as he pleases; Shuggie tends to the graveyard grass and helps Red steal painkillers from helpless cancer patients; and Glenda sips her "tea" cocktails and flirts with Shuggie. Then balding but classy Jimmy Vin Pearce roars into their lives in a shiny green T-bird and begins an affair with Glenda. Overcome by jealousy, Shuggie must decide should he betray his mother or grant her happiness? Woodrell displays his characters in an unforgiving light, never succumbing to the urge to romanticize them. Through unsparing prose and deft characterization, he conveys the harsh philosophy best summed up in one of Glenda's rare bits of motherly advice: "You wake up in this here world, my sweet li'l mister, you got to wake up tough. You go out that front door tough of a mornin' and stay tough 'til lights out have you learned that?" Woodrell's merciless realism is shot through with humor and rural wisdom; his work may not be to everyone's taste, but his bleak world is rendered with consummate artistry. (May 21) Forecast: Woodrell is a cult figure in England and elsewhere in Europe, where he was on the short list for the 2000 Dublin International Literary Award. Count on good reviews of this novel to raise his profile here.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Shuggie Akins, an awkward 13-year-old, lives with his mother and Red in a caretaker's

house on graveyard grounds. Red's been married to Glenda since Shug was born, but it's uneasily, tacitly understood that he is not the boy's biological father. A small-time crook, the physically and verbally abusive man steals everything from televisions to shipments of silk blouses. For recreation, he forces Shug to creep into the houses of terminally ill people and rob them of their prescription drugs. At one point, Shug witnesses the funeral of a small boy, one of the victims of Red's thieving. One night, Red gambles away Glenda's stolen silk blouse and demands that she remove it in front of Shug and the winner of the bet. Glenda seems to dote on her son, but never enough, of course, to remove them from the situation. She calls him her "sweet mister"-sort of a cross between the clichés of a "true gentleman" and a "knight in shining armor." She's physically affectionate with him, and her behavior infuses Shug with a kind of seething, uncomfortable lust. While his relationship with Red is openly brutal, it is the relationship with his mother that is the more dangerous and fascinating. Woodrell is an absolute master at building tension in relaxed prose, and the novel has a haunting and wonderful force. Events churn to a head when Glenda meets a slick, citified man with a shiny Thunderbird, and decides to leave Red-and Shug-for the promises he offers. Sweet mister's death, for the record, is a figurative one, yet it feels more tragic than a literal one.

Emily Lloyd, Fairfax County Public Library, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Gemma Jackson:

The publication with title The Death of Sweet Mister: A Novel possesses a lot of information that you can learn it. You can get a lot of help after read this book. This particular book exist new expertise the information that exist in this guide represented the condition of the world now. That is important to you to be aware of how the improvement of the world. This book will bring you inside new era of the syndication. You can read the e-book on your own smart phone, so you can read the idea anywhere you want.

Michelle Jennings:

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Colleen Nguyen:

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