

My department was the last to go.

Rumors had been drizzling the halls for three months. “Did’ya hear? We’re being bought out!” people whose names I didn’t even know began whispering to me conspiratorially. Maybe they figured my IT Department had tapped into the CEO’s computer and had the inside scoop. If only my job was that exciting. I was the only woman in a unit of five; six if one counted our manager, who I most certainly didn’t. Finally one day I cornered Jim, my mentor. He shrugged. “I got nothin’, Ash. I’ve heard the same things you have.”

Finally, the local stations trumpeted the news. An East Coast conglomerate called Accenco was my new boss. I tried to rationalize the revelation. Maybe we’d all get huge raises. Summit was a dinky company in the larger scheme of things, although it was the burliest business in my small town. Anybody who didn’t crave urban relocation set their sights on landing a job at Summit. It was either that or the TastyChill, and competition was fierce for the drive-in’s three part-time summer positions.

But instead of absorbing us, Accenco chose to spit us out. It wasn’t long before departments began emptying, leaving hollow spaces where conversation had once vibrated like an electric razor.

Reality was a punch in the gut. There were no jobs in town. Zero. None. That didn’t stop me from checking online three times a day. I managed to secure an interview with Jensen’s Dry Cleaning, but the day before my appointment, Mister Jensen called and said he regretted to inform me that he’d filled the position. What did I know about dry

cleaning anyway? Who was I to steal a job away from someone who was schooled in the use of perchloroethylene solvent? (Yes, I'd looked it up.)

I didn't want to move. Move where? Dad was still mourning Mom's death and I couldn't leave him just like that. All we had was each other. I'd moved back in with him a year ago; set up a new basement existence, with enough separation between us to maintain a semblance of independence, yet close enough to fix him dinner every night and quietly assume Mom's responsibilities.

Five days after my scuttled interview, I spied an ad on craigslist for "Summer Sidewalk Artists/Ride Operators" at a lake resort called Tulip Tree near the little hamlet of Mentre, only forty-five minutes away. Dad, Mom, and I had visited Lake Relance every summer until I turned fifteen and refused to go anymore. The lake had a sandy swimming beach, a diving platform, a phalanx of floating tubers, and really cute boys who populated the lakeshore every mid-July. But the biggest, most famed attraction on Lake Relance was the giant ferris wheel, erected in 1907 by an immigrant farmer named Jean Cloutier, and fashioned out of leftover wood and a steam engine he'd finagled from the local rail yard.

As the decades passed, Lake Relance had become a regional destination. Sometime in the post-war years an opportunist erected a creamy-painted carousel near Cloutier's miracle, and things ballooned from there. Cloutier's wheel was eventually replaced by a sturdy steel edifice, and soon an unofficial amusement park sprouted on the grassland like a whisper. By the time my parents began taking me to Lake Relance a boardwalk, fashioned from cedar, encircled the lake and cabins dotted the tree line. When I was eleven, I loved it. I'd pad up the sandy path from a day of swimming and

sunbathing with my friend Nic, singe my feet on the searing boardwalk planks, then hose the sand off my skin in the outdoor shower. Nic and I would meet up again to browse the outdoor snack bar. We always giggled past the sidewalk artists, although I secretly wished I could have one of them draw my portrait.

And now here I was, with a minor in fine arts, contemplating a return to my adolescent days, only this time I'd be on the other side of the easel.

Mister Faberes barely peered up from the paperwork he was scribbling on as I sat across from his desk, silently willing my leg to stop jumping. Mister Faberes had a dozen applicants ten years younger than me clustered outside his door and I suspected I was wasting this man's time.

My gaze fixed on his onyx ring with an embedded diamond that he kept tapping against his papers distractedly.

"I actually minored in it in college," I offered finally to break the stilted silence. *What do those kids outside know about painting?*

He tore off his bifocals and finally looked me in the eye.

"Well, I'll be!" he said. "They actually offer a course in that? What is this world coming to?"

"Y....yes," I stammered. "I can show you my work."

"No, no. Anyone who minored in ride operation is good enough in my book. Can you start on the eighth?"

I drove home in a trance and immediately fired up the craigslist ad. “Summer Sidewalk Artists/Ride Operators”.

It was *one* job! I’d just agreed to manhandle the Tilt-A-Whirl!

SHADOW SONG

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REVIEWS:

~ infinitybooks4  **Book Review** 

Sometimes, all you need is a quick read that will distract you and keep you entertained for a short while, and this book really hit the spot. The author’s skill at her craft is evident in the way she portrays Ashley’s loneliness and her self-assurance in her ability to handle situations. Carefully plotted and nicely written. With a hint of suspense, every character’s emotion was expertly captured. The descriptive narration captivates you, thrills you with investigations, and has heart-warming moments that melt your heart.

A Captivating Novel

~ S.J. Main

“Shadow Song” by April Tompkins is a captivating novel that skillfully blends elements of mystery, romance, and personal growth into a seamless narrative. The story follows Ashley Montrose, a woman whose life takes an unexpected turn after she loses her job and stumbles into an unforeseen adventure that challenges her in every possible way.

Ashley’s journey begins with a simple job search that leads her to a resort near her home. Misunderstandings at her job interview land her in the role of a carnival ride operator instead of the portrait painter she aspired to be. Despite the initial setback, Ashley embraces her new circumstances, finding joy and a sense of purpose in her supervisory role and the camaraderie she builds with a group of itinerant ride handlers.

However, the tranquility of her new life is shattered when she discovers the body of her boss, thrusting her into the center of a murder investigation. The introduction of Mitch, the rival painter she initially despises, adds depth to the story as their relationship evolves from antagonism to support and, ultimately, romance.

Tompkins weaves a complex tale that explores themes of resilience, the importance of community, and the transformative power of unexpected challenges. Ashley’s character is relatable and inspiring, showcasing the strength it takes to navigate adversity and emerge stronger on the other side.

The mystery element of the novel is well-crafted, keeping readers on the edge of their seats as Ashley, with the help of Mitch and private investigator Greg, unravels the truth behind her boss's death. The resolution is satisfying, providing closure to the murder mystery while opening new doors for Ashley's future.

“Shadow Song” is not just a mystery novel; it's a story about finding oneself in the most unlikely of places and the unexpected paths life can take us on. April Tompkins delivers a compelling narrative filled with twists and turns, emotional depth, and characters that stay with you long after the last page. Whether you're a fan of mysteries, romance, or tales of personal discovery, “Shadow Song” is a must-read that offers something for everyone.

OTHER BOOKS BY APRIL TOMPKINS

[Running From Herself](#) (novel)

[Lies and Love](#) (novella)

[Inn Dreams](#) (novella)

[New Kaitlyn](#) (novella)

[The Diner Girl](#) (novella)

[Bad Blood](#) (novella)

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