



## Liar's Bench

*Kim Michele Richardson*

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## **Liar's Bench** Kim Michele Richardson

In 1972, on Mudas Summers' seventeenth birthday, her beloved Mama, Ella, is found hanging from the rafters of their home. Most people in Peckinpaw, Kentucky, assume that Ella's no-good husband did the deed. Others think Ella grew tired of his abuse and did it herself. Muddy is determined to find out for sure either way, especially once she finds strange papers hidden amongst her mama's possessions.

But Peckinpaw keeps its secrets buried deep. Muddy's almost-more-than-friend, Bobby Marshall, knows that better than most. Though he passes for white, one of his ancestors was Frannie Crow, a slave hanged a century ago on nearby Hark Hill Plantation. Adorning the town square is a seat built from Frannie's gallows. A tribute, a relic--and a caution--it's known as Liar's Bench. Now, the answers Muddy seeks soon lead back to Hark Hill, to hatred and corruption that have echoed through the years--and lies she must be brave enough to confront at last.

Kim Michele Richardson's lush, beautifully written debut is set against a Southern backdrop passing uneasily from bigotry and brutality to hope. With its compelling mystery and complex yet relatable heroine, *Liar's Bench* is a story of first love, raw courage, and truths that won't be denied.

## **Liar's Bench Details**

Date : Published April 28th 2015 by Kensington (first published March 20th 2012)

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Author : Kim Michele Richardson

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## From Reader Review *Liar's Bench* for online ebook

### Myrna says

I finished this book days ago but I'm having a hard time rating and reviewing it. *Liar's Bench* has a great premise, powerful beginning, beautiful cover, and some interesting characters (Bobby's grandfather, Jessum, is my favorite). Plus the author paints a vivid picture of the 1970s era and a small Southern town. I didn't rate it any higher because when Bobby comes into the picture, the story takes on a different tone and style. At times I felt like I was reading a different book. If you like historical fiction books that include hope, love, lies, racism and secrets, you might like this book. I would read another book by this author. Thank you NetGalley for the advance copy!

Quote I liked: "*Look for the brightest star tonight and toss your wish to the heavens.*"

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### Ashley says

I enjoyed the book, thought it dragged in the middle a bit but still enjoyed reading through it. I thought the book wrapped up well. Maybe it didn't quite deserve a four star rating but thought it definitely deserved more than a 3.

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### Mary Montgomery hornback says

I really, really wanted to like this book since author is from my husband's home state of KY where I lived for some years, and the book has a beautiful cover that appealed to me. Unfortunately, I found reading it down right painful...the dialogue is contrived and not in the least bit authentic. The author is attempting to capture the southern flavor of speech but fails miserably. In addition the story is taking place in the early 70's...a time of racism, and great divides between people in our country...yet, we are supposed to believe that a white girl from the south is allowed to date a black boy. Those of us who lived through those years know it just wouldn't happen in a small southern town. While the author certainly has the ability to write, I think her editor did her a great disservice in not pointing out the blatant anachronisms and the appearance of unauthentic dialogue. Shame on the editor!

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### Zoeytron says

In the town square of Peckinpaw, Kentucky, there is a sitting bench. Dubbed the Liar's Bench, it is constructed of wood from a gallows used to hang an innocent woman over a hundred years ago.

Many have taken a seat there on the Liar's Bench. It provides a perch for gaggles of old women who gossip and cackle, their false teeth clicking and clacking as they chat and judge. It lends a welcome site for old men to rest their weary bones while they smoke and reminisce, or for young lovers to sit and make their plans, slyly stealing the occasional smooch. The bench is there for anyone who needs to sit a spell and take a load

off.

It was easy to picture the Top Hat Cafe, Shucks Grocery, and folks winding down from the day on front porches sipping sweet tea from jelly jars, swaying gently in their porch swings. Can't say that I've ever heard of Cow Plop Bingo, but apparently it is a thing. (They must use really big bingo cards there. Ha!)

Although the storyline never did really click into place for me, and the dialog seemed a bit off, the setting itself made it worth reading.

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## **Gena DeBardelaben says**

eARC: Netgalley

A visit with Mudas in 1972 Peckinpaw, Kentucky feels just a step away from a visit with Scout in 1930s Maycomb County, Alabama. Four decades may have passed between the two settings, but racism still runs deep in the hearts of the citizens of Peckinpaw. That racism has spawned lies and hatred that have bled deeply into the old oak of the liar's bench that sits in the town square of Peckinpaw.

I can remember the hot summer days of 1972 when I was a young girl visiting my grandmother in a small town in south Alabama. Time moved slowly and the air was heavy and thick with the Vietnam War and the unwritten rules of how the different races treated each other. After dark on Friday nights it was an all too common occurrence to see men in white hoods standing around bonfires on the river bank. Liar's Bench brought back memories I haven't thought about in years.

Get yourself a copy of Liar's Bench and come visit the South in 1972.

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## **Shelby \*trains flying monkeys\* says**

Muddy Summer's seventeenth birthday went straight to hell. Her mama Ella has been found and it appears that she has hung herself. Muddy refuses to believe Ella would do such a thing and knows that her mama's husband beats her ever chance he gets. Once she starts digging she realizes that the whole town has secrets and lies.

Set in the early 1970's this book pretty much centers itself around the town landmark. The Liar's Bench.

The Liar's Bench came into being a century before when a slave named Frannie Crow was hanged based on her mistresses lies. Her son dismantled the gallows and built the bench.

If you read this book get used to hearing about that bench. I think it's only mentioned in every chapter at least twice.

Muddy's sorta boyfriend is Bobby Marshall who is a mixed race descendant of Frannie Crow's. So into the story you have some racism and bigotry. The thing is I felt that Muddy even showed signs of it. I think I would have liked her better if she hadn't been so wishy-washy. He's the only person that sticks up for her and she sorta whines her way through any confrontations that pop up.

The story line is not bad for this book. I love southern fiction. I have lived in the south my whole life and one of the big things that sticks out in this book is the language. I have never heard of a southern person using the language that gets used in this book.

It's one of those things that I felt demeaned southern people. We have slang and we have some southern drawl but I don't think I've ever heard the phrase.....**It doesn't do anyone any good to pluck their chickens in the wind.**

Huh?

It completely threw the book off for me. The whole book is written in the oddest language.

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## Nancy Narma says

“The Scars of Others Should Teach Us Caution”

Back in August of 1860, in Peckinpaw, Kentucky, Mrs. Evelyn Anderson, Mistress of Hark Hill Plantation, reported that she had been poisoned by her House Slave, Frannie Crow. Frannie had been a victim of rape by the Plantation's overseer and was unable to go about her usual schedule of house chores the following day after the assault. When questioned, Frannie confessed what had happened. Instead of having a pittance of sympathy, the Mistress summoned the overseer and demanded that Frannie be flogged for all of the help to witness. Two weeks later, the frail and pregnant Mistress called for Frannie's assistance, complaining of a stomach ailment. Remembering the concoction that her own Grandmother gave for such ailments, Frannie fixes her a mild and milky tea. Just hours later, Mrs. Anderson miscarries. Mr. Anderson reports the “poisoning” and Frannie to the town marshal. After a 15 minute trial, Frannie Crow is found guilty and is hanged 5 days later. The remnants of her wooden gallows are given to her son Amos which eventually stand as a reminder of the lies which helped to create the gallows and is known as a “Liar's Bench” in the town square. Many years later—in 1972, we are introduced to Mudas Summers, who, sadly is attending the burial of her Mother on her 17th Birthday. Mudas' Father is a prosecuting Attorney and neither he nor Mudas believe Ella committed suicide, as was claimed. A grief-stricken Mudas decides to uncover the truth, not only for her own peace of mind, but to clear her Mother's muddied name and make the future right for her Half-Sister, Genevieve. She is met with lies, rumors, and shocking details that may lead her in the wrong direction. Mudas is accompanied in her quest by her best friend, Bobby Marshall, who discovers some surprises himself, as well as deeper feelings that have been well-hidden for a long time. They realize quickly that they're up against many dangerous characters. What has the Rooster Run Ledger got to do with any of this? Has the spirit of Frannie Crow returned to claim justice and a better life for her loved ones? A lesson may be learned by all that there should be as much respect for the deceased as there is for the living.

This is a fantastic story which will hold you in suspense and not let you go until you, sadly, reach the last page. The characters practically jump off the page due to the descriptiveness. The Author has also kindly included recipes for Mudas' favorite “Red Cabbage Apple Casserole” and yummy sounding “Potato Candy”. I'm anxiously looking forward to Ms. Richardson's next work and I bet you will too!

Nancy Narma

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## Kenya Reviews Stuff (ReviewsMayVary) says

The fact that she pulled the trigger earned this a whole extra star. That's not really a spoiler, calm thy tits.

This is the book of two women who are hanged for questions to their loyalty/honesty, 100 years apart, and the teen relatives who are determined to find their truths. It's also 1970 something Kentucky so there's lots of race stuff and gender stuff and a shot gun.

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## Jeanie says

**Two hangings more than a hundred years apart, as different from each other as the standing oak is from the sunflower in the field. But connected ....-connected by the fertile Kentucky soil and the evils they foretold.**

Liar's Bench is the town's bench where promises are made and where white lies are told. The bench was made from the gallows that hung Frannie Crow over a hundred years ago. Falsely accused by her mistress, she was hung as she cursed the town for its bigotry and racism. The evils of slavery with the root of men's greed for power and a woman's fear led to Frannie's false accusation and hanging.

A hundred years later in the year of 1972, the same evils prevail and another hanging has occurred. A young white married woman with children has been found by her daughter Mudas Summers. Mudas reminds me of Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Her parents are divorced, her mother has remarried but is in abusive relationship. Mudas is 17 and you are pulled into her into her story, her pain and her determination to find out what has happened to her mother. Her mother's death is ruled a suicide; however, Mudas cannot live with that. She knows there is more to it.

I loved this story and the characters. You have both, the characters you love to love and those you love to hate. The two hangings are pulled together that bring redemption to a town and family that are torn by lies but when the truth is revealed, redemption is made sweet.

*A Special Thank you to Kensington and Netgalley for ARC and the opportunity to post an honest review.*

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## Jeanine says

At first I was mesmerized by the language. Then it became too flowery and too full of a southern drawl that didn't feel natural and remote slang that was just excessive.

Plus I was sore from sitting on that liars bench two or three times every chapter.

So much drama but each outcome was rather unlikely.

Being just scratched up after that car wreck?

Ecstasy during a teenagers first time? All that undercover info exchanged but never overheard on the party line?

And the author wanted to work in the mantra about "muddying up your boots" so badly

that she named the main character Mudus.

A wonderful premise for a book. I just felt cheated reading it. It reminded me of an overzealous attempt by a creative writing student.

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### **Lori says**

Unfortunately, this novel just didn't work for me. I never felt connected to any of the characters. I kept thinking throughout the entire novel, 'Is there no where else to sit in this town?'. The over use of the 'Liars Bench' truly irritated me. Oh, well.

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### **MARILYN says**

I found this book to be tedious with the protagonist whining and it seemed to go nowhere. I would have liked more substance about Mudus and the relationship with her parents. I also have no patience for someone who keeps allowing themselves to be abused. I received a copy from Goodreads Givaway for a honest review.

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### **Sasha says**

Um, wow. No. Words.

(Which is good, since my Grandma always tells me that if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all...)

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### **Mauoijenn ~ \*Mouthy Jenn\* ~ says**

#### **Outstanding!!!**

This book had me up till 4 am to finish it. Its one of those books that you keep thinking about hours after you're finished. A great historical fiction packed with lies, suicide and family history. A most excellent book.

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### **Judy Collins says**

**LIAR'S BENCH**, a powerful southern debut novel, by *Kim Michele Richardson*, a multi-generational chilling mystery, with a mix of coming-of-age, humor, and historical fiction--*covering a century of deceit.*

**From racial injustice**, lies, small-town secrets, murder, corruption, two senseless hangings, and three strong heroines of different generations; grabbing you by the heart from the first page to the last, and never letting go. *Lovable well-developed characters you will remember long after the book ends!*

**As the novel opens**, it is 1860, and readers briefly learn of the nasty mistress of Hark Hill Plantation, Mrs.

Evelyn Anderson who cannot seem to deliver an heir for her husband. Her faithful and innocent house slave, Frannie Crow has been raped and accused of poisoning her mistress. Of course, after a jury of all white men, she does not stand a chance. They find her guilty and within a week the people line up on Town Square to watch the hanging- a proposed “poisoner and a thief”. Frannie goes to her death with no one knowing the real truth. *She is innocent and her owners are the liars.*

**Afterwards, her son Amos** is given the pieces of his mama’s gallows and two healthy hogs, along with his freedom papers. He is instructed to build a bench for the town square out of the wood left over to be called Anderson bench. But its legacy of misfortune drawn from lies, false promises, and tall tales earned the name of *Liar’s Bench, the center point of the novel.*

**As we jump to 1972,** we hear from our main protagonist, Mudas Elizabeth Summers, age seventeen, living in rural small town Peckinpaw, Kentucky, with her dad, Adam Persis Summers, attorney-- well liked in the small southern town. *Of course, her dad also vowed to love her mom, Ella Mudas Tilley but he cheated and drank. More lies.*

**Unfortunately, Mudas** had to leave her dad after the divorce and moved with her mom to Nashville, where her mom learns to love her refreshments (liquor) after she began associating with the devil, Tommy. Before the age of nine, her mom had married a horrible and abusive man, Tommy Dale Whitlock and Mudas were in the way, so back to Peckinpaw--*her mom drops her off to live with her dad.*

**Before this time,** her dad quit drinking and cheating and begged her mom back with no success. Her mom later returns to Peckinpaw with Tommy, and they have a daughter Genevieve. She becomes close to her mom with weekly visits when Tommy is not around; however, due to him, she was not invited to live with them.

**Now, her mom is dead,** hanging from the rafters. She is heartbroken and knows it has to be a druggie and abusive Tommy, or the nasty man, McGee; however, everyone says it was suicide. What do McGee and a ledger have to do with her death? She loves her mom, and knows for certain she would never commit suicide. She has found the killer and figures out the mystery--as we continue to learn more about the events leading up to the murder (hanging).

**Mudas is a smart,** headstrong, passionate, and tenacious young woman. She is not like most girls- she is fighting in a man’s world of the deep south in the 1960s and 1970s in a small-minded town, in the middle of unrest and racial injustice, telephone party lines, the KKK, Vietnam, Civil Right movement--her school does not even allow for a proper women’s athletic program-- even though she is a runner with a promising scholarship.

**A virgin, and naïve in the dating** department, she misses her grandmother, long gone; her recipes, warm, loving heart, and wise tales of scents of a man; how to know real love; now no mother to confide in. Like most girls from a small town, she has visions of success, an education, love, and a better life. With only one best girlfriend, she now has a best guy friend, Bobby. He is part Indian, Caucasian, and African American; smart and maybe going to college in Boston, as has lived in the big city-- the north where he is accepted; unlike this town, where he is treated like a second-class citizen. She loves him, and he wants to help her uncover the truth about her mom, and in the process, he may learn more about his own past.

**They are saying bad things about her mom** and the danger intensifies the closer they get to discovering the truth; many clues leading them back to Hark Hill Plantation, a graveyard, a tree, a cave, encrypted messages, ribbons, a ledger, and some cruel and evil men – *nothing will stop her --and Bobby is beside her every step of*



*the way.*

**In this stunning coming-of-age charmer**, Mudas and Bobby, two teens take on the entire town full of evil, corruption, and prejudice as they fight all obstacles for justice, not only for their respective generation but more importantly their family, and the strong women heroines who gave their life, as they help clear their names for generations to follow. A mix of murder, suspense, thriller, mystery, coming-of-age, first loves, and historical and Southern Gothic fiction - crossing several genres.

**Loved, loved LIAR'S BENCH** and you will root for these two, to the end (loved the grandfather, too). When I read the summary, I knew I would adore, and immediately starting recommending to my Goodreads' friends, before I reached page fifty.

**With a line-up of advance praise** from my favorite authors: *Beth Hoffman, Diane Chamberlain, Amy Conner, Jamie Mason, and Susan Wiggs*; high expectations--*Kim Michele Richardson*, storyteller, lives up to every word, and does not disappoint.

**An outstanding debut novel**, (*predict a bestseller*) will warm your heart in this triumph over tragedy southern tale. Being in this age range, growing up in the south, Richardson is "right on" with dialect, atmosphere, and setting of these times.

**Infused with vivid descriptions** of nature, and true love explained through scents, and the strength of a strong young woman ready to shed her childhood ways for womanhood during a time before love, peace, and bell-bottoms---making an ideal selection for book clubs with some great discussion questions included.

I am looking forward to reading Richardson's previous memoir: *The Unbreakable Child: A Memoir About Forgiving the Unforgivable*.

Fans of *Dollbaby, Calling Me Home, The Right Thing, This Dark Road to Mercy, Snapshot, To Kill a Mockingbird, The Color of Justice, Necessary Lies, The Third Hill North of Town, and upcoming Lavina*, will enjoy this entertaining southern gem. Highly recommend!

*A special thank you to Kensington Books and NetGalley for an ARC in exchange for an honest review.*

JDC Must Read Books

Look for Richardson's second novel, *GodPretty in the Tobacco Field* and add to your reading list, *The Sisters of Glass Ferry*, Coming Nov 28, 2017. 5 Stars! (Kentucky's Finest Storyteller). Grab a bottle of bourbon and get ready for some juicy southern secrets.

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