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A Room Away from the Wolves

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Sabina Tremper is an American girl of seventeen years. Her mother has just moved in with a partner who is father to two daughters. Sabina's stepsisters accuse her of telling lies about them. Unfortunately Sabina's mother sides with the other two. Sabina is forced to leave home and move to Catherine House, a mysterious boarding home for girls. It transpires that as a teenager Sabina's mother had herself been a resident of Catherine House. One of the sinister features of Catherine House is that girls regularly arrive there but it is most unusual to see anyone leave, Sabina's mother being an exception. The novel poses the questions what are the secrets of this strange abode and will Sabina ever escape?

This book has traditional ingredients for a gothic novel which on the face of it should work well. In fact they don't. This reviewer found it impossible to feel any connection to the characters of the story. We already suspect Sabina, the first person narrator, of telling lies. The literary convention of the unreliable narrator can effectively generate uncertainty and tension. In this case however the unreliability of the narrator generates confusion and divided loyalty. It is perhaps part of the convention that a back story provides a reliable framework within which the unreliable elements can be assessed. This novel plunges headlong into the action without any such back story. In summary, this book represents a praiseworthy experiment which sadly misses the mark.

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