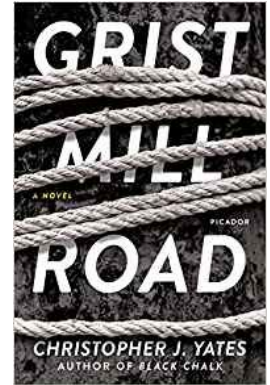


Grist Mill Road by Christopher J. Yates
Publish date: Picador New York, 2017

Appearances Can Be Deceiving

A suspense novel that works on the reader's imagination with its tantalizing layering of surprises and anticipation, *Grist Mill Road* is difficult to put down. From the very first pages, the atmosphere is appropriately moody and traps the reader with a delicious shivery foreboding. The story opens with a nightmare description of an event that haunts three characters for twenty-three years and resurfaces when all three meet again in 2008.



In the summer of 1982, Patrick, Matthew, and Hannah, three adolescents who ride their bikes all over the beautiful mountain landscape of a small town in upstate New York, pass their time playing games that are simple diversions that most kids do in peaceful idyllic surroundings. That is, until a BB gun, usually used for plinking tin cans from rocky escarpments, is wielded by Matthew and wounds Hannah so severely that she loses one eye. Matthew is a troublemaker, beautiful Hannah is innocent, and Patrick is not present to witness Matthew's incomprehensible cruelty. Patrick and his family pull up stakes and leave small town Roseborn, Matthew goes to jail for his crime, and Hannah barely survives her high school years. The story could end there, as so many similar tales of bad teenager judgment do, but there is a catch.

Patrick, or Patch as he known to his adoring wife Hannah, lives with her in New York City. She is a successful crime reporter and journalist for the newspaper. By the way, she wears a prosthetic eye or eyepatch. Indeed, Patch has married the woman who Matthew had injured when they were teenagers. He has also just been fired from his office job and is now a food blogger; the couple has no money worries since she is the sole heir to her father's cement empire after the rest of her family was killed in an accident. Patch might be slipping into madness, but his menus and food preparation skills are astounding.

Matthew will come sneaking into the picture soon enough, and the part each of them played in the grotesque event of August 1982 will begin to shift into a darker, more complicated mosaic.

This novel depends heavily on the element of suspense, so it would be unfair to reveal anything more about its direction. It is enough of a recommendation to say that it holds the reader in a trance throughout, very deliberately serving up clarifications that in their turn twist the idea of who is really guilty of a crime abruptly into another direction.

At the center lies the question of how reliable is our vision in times of confusion and shock? It is symbolic that Hannah's eye has been destroyed—did she see something she should not have or misinterpret another person's behavior. This lack of clear vision wrapped in adolescent naïveté sparks questions that dog the reader as the story unfolds. The author sprinkles references to the eye liberally, just enough to be humorous in a macabre sort of way.

Patrick, Matthew, and Hannah's voices stitch together the story with their own perspective, so the reader has to pay attention when the story quickly shifts, both in speaker and time. Although there might be an element or two that are a little forced or contrived, that doesn't spoil the story itself, and *Grist Mill Road* is worthy of the time spent reading it.