

Excerpt from **SMALL GAME HUNTING AT THE LOCAL COWARDS GUN CLUB**

Olive hears the latch squeal before the hinges squeak. A black arm heaves garbage bags onto the sidewalk one after the other. There are so many. More waste than is normal. Food that went off during the previous day's storm is now bagged and tossed out for collectors who will not come until it fully clears. Olive worries the birds will have at it.

Omi will be blamed for the weather's interference in the city schedule if he doesn't re-collect it. Olive wills him to remember so he won't get in trouble. Omi is from Nigeria. Olive thinks he is her age but she can't be sure. She has been trying to figure out how to ask without seeming ignorant or making him angry. She has never seen him angry but is still afraid ignorant questions might jeopardize their friendship. She didn't even know they were friends until he said. One day weeks ago while she was waiting for Iris, he approached her on the sidewalk.

Girl, you okay?

Olive didn't know how to answer this honestly so shook her head.

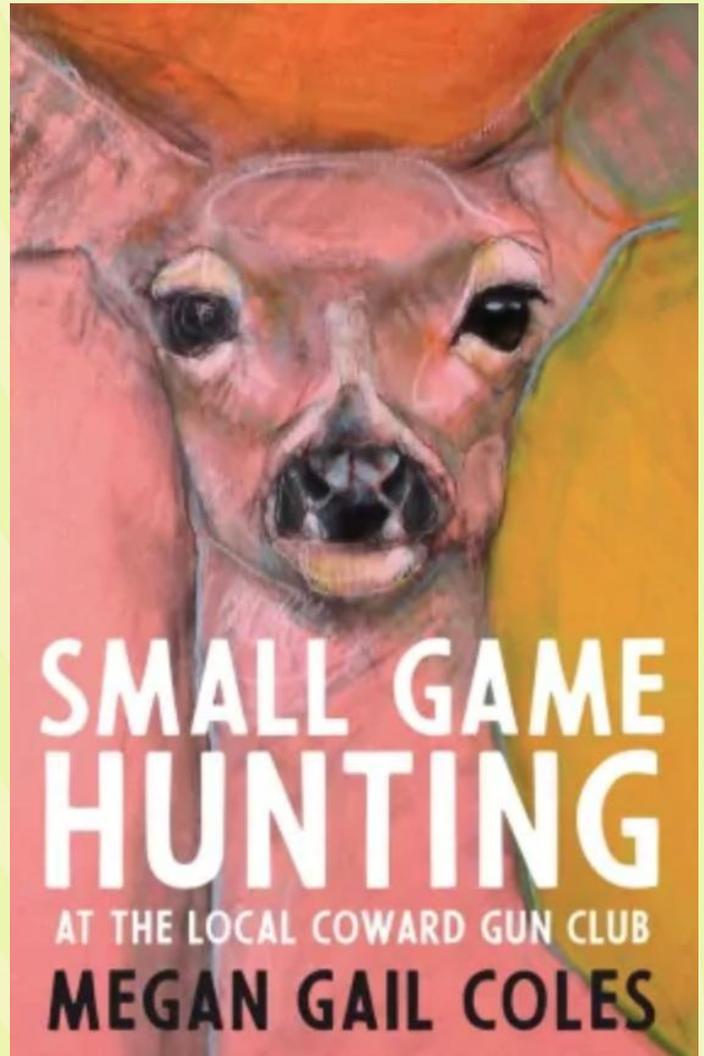
Omi was staring at her skeptically. She worried there was something on her face. In her teeth. She dug through her pockets hoping he would think her busy searching out some important thing. She muttered quietly to the ground before adding I'm good as a hurried afterthought.

Excuse me?

I'm good!

Olive had barked much too loudly. Omi put up his palms in mock terror.

You good. Got it.



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Olive then pretended to investigate the fraying fringe on a bag that had been new when it had not been hers. She bashful blushed at the ground.

Hey, where you from?

Here.

Sure, but where's your family from?

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Around the bay.

Around what bay?

What?

What's your bay called?

There's no bay.

There's no bay?

I mean, there are lots of bays. I mean, it's more of a peninsula.

Olive held up her left pinky and left thumb while watching her other digits labour to curl tightly into her palm's pad. A gesture she learned in adolescence had quickly become reflex. She pinched her left pinky with her right forefinger and thumb before quickly unsnapping the clasp to correct her constant mistake. Olive swung her wrist around to flash knuckles facing out at Omi, who watched her waiting with growing curiosity. Olive recoiled her central digits once more for effect and popped her beloved peninsulas.

This is Newfoundland.

She pinched her left thumb and forefinger.

We're here.

She then reached over the interior to pinch her pinky and wiggle it a bit.

I'm from up here.

They both stood quietly transfixed by Olive's wiggling pinky until she stopped wiggling it. She stood there looking at her held little finger wondering what to say next.

So... you all white?

And Olive had not known how to answer this direct question dredging through the whole of her life like it was just a fact to simply say.

Cause you don't look all white.

And Olive feels small again.

Bullies were just other girls back then. Olive feared them at the bus stop and missed the bus a lot.

She hears the older girl whisper first the taunt before sliding her freckled hand down across Olive's bare arm and then turning to wipe her fingertips along the skin of whoever stood close behind, the whole of the lunch line recoiling at the thought of contact with dirty little Olive, hysterical screeches gaining volume and velocity as they passed this gruesome contact to the furthest student standing at the back.

Olive's germs on you!

Olive's germs.

And the schoolchildren passed her shame through the cafeteria, giggling and howling, yuck, reaching at each other in delight as they rid themselves of her germs. Olive, the tarriest one in line. There were other tarry children, a whole range of shade, a spectrum really, but they were not hated by this girl as Olive was hated. Bullies were just other girls back then. Olive feared them at the bus stop and missed the bus a lot.

Her grandmother yelling for her to leave earlier or this will keep happening.

The teacher that day finally grabbed the ringleader by her pale arm and shook her as Olive looked on in tears.

Mrs. Morris barking, you're no better than she is, little miss! You're no different!

Shaking the one girl Olive wanted to befriend but feared, until both girls were crying in the lunchroom before the whole student body. The smell of seven-layer dinner resting in their throats, gagging them both.

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You say you're sorry right now, say you're sorry to Olive!

But the girl who started the hateful game would not say she was sorry.

I'm sorry.

The sound of regret in the man's voice brought Olive back to her adult-self.

Perhaps you are not supposed to ask that here.

No.

What?

I'm... not all white. Not really. Part Indian.

And that was the first time Olive had said it aloud to a stranger.