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BOOKS

Family secrets

Lesbians go exploring the landscapes
of the earth and mind

BY KATHY BELGE

THIS WILD SILENCE
by Lucy Jane Bledsoe; Alyson
Publications, 2003; \$13.95
softcover

SOUTHLAND
by Nina Revoyr; Akashic Books,
2003; \$15.95 softcover

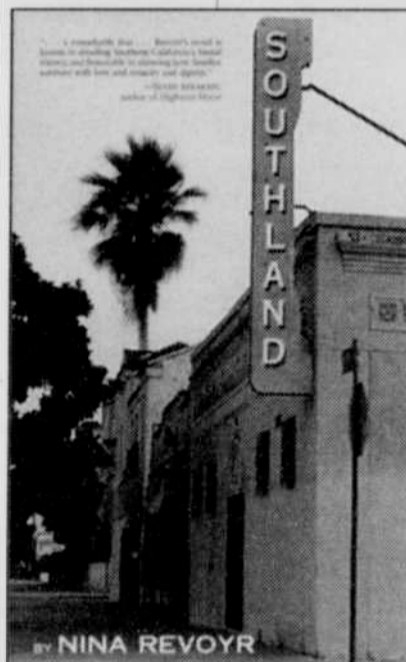
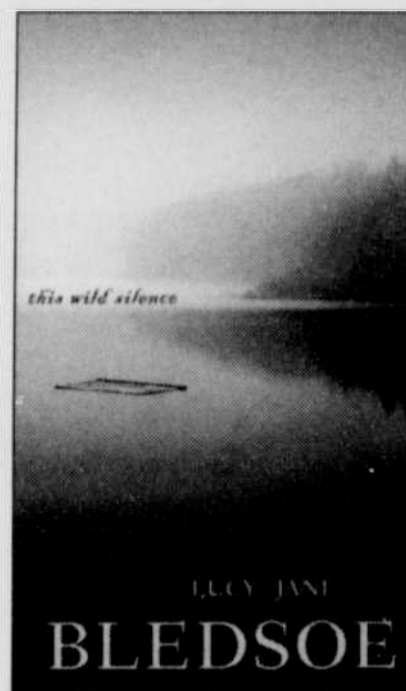
Family secrets—we've all got 'em. Sometimes we hold them inside, sure that their revelation will somehow violently disrupt our world. But sometimes the discovery of them can open up our lives in ways we never dreamed, like finding out that your favorite "old maid" aunt was really a lesbian.

Two recent novels explore the theme of family secrets and the new world of possibilities when those secrets are uncovered.

This Wild Silence is the story of two adult sisters haunted by the disappearance of their brother 30 years ago. Lucy Jane Bledsoe, whose other titles include sports dyke fiction and lesbian travel studies, leads us this time on a journey of the psyche when the novel's sisters embark on a winter camping trip where they are not only physically and mentally challenged but forced to face the truth of what happened the day brother Timothy disappeared.

Younger sister Tina, a dyke doctor in San Francisco's tenderloin district, muddles her way through medical school, love and life, always haunted by the past. Big sister Liz seems to have moved on, and Tina holds this against her.

The novel culminates high in the Sierras as their trip takes a sudden bad turn. Bledsoe's crisp writing flows well in this harsh environment. The story reaches back and forth in time as Tina confronts a series of failed relationships and attempts to solve the mystery of her brother's disappearance. Against this stark backdrop,



Lenny, a teen-ager they've brought along, offers much-needed comic relief.

The story is engaging enough, but ultimately it's Bledsoe's writing that keeps you turning the pages with mood-setting description: "The morning's horizon is violent with the colors of dawn. Blood red. Fire orange. Bruise purple. Smear like pain across the sky, over the mountains and frozen lake. It's a raw morning, new as an egg...."

Even more of a page-turner is *Southland*, which is the kind of skillful mystery that keeps you reading late into the night. Author of the popular *The Necessary Hunger*, Nina Revoyr does not disappoint with her sophomore novel.

Japanese American lesbian lawyer Jackie Ishida sets out to uncover the secrets of her grandfather's past when, after his death, she discovers a mysterious will among his papers. Who is this person her grandfather willed his store to?

Although the store is no longer in the family, it was part of a rich and vibrant multicultural Los Angeles between the 1930s and 1960s. From Japanese internment camps to the Watts riots to modern-day segregated Los

Angeles, the novel reaches back and forth through time as Jackie discovers the truth of her grandfather's life. In the process she discovers a part of herself she didn't know was missing.

Part mystery, part historical fiction, *Southland* is one of those books that stays with you long after you put it down. Not your typical lesbian mystery, its thoughtful story and beautifully rendered words will appeal beyond a lesbian audience; in fact, I'm planning on sending a copy to my father, who is always looking for a good book.

Both these novels of journey into family will find you questioning your own history and whether the truth is always what you think. **J**

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