



***Sunburn*, by Laura Lippman**  
**Reviewed by Cindy Kennedy, August 2019**

“Hot and steamy” could describe the month of August as well as *Sunburn*, Laura Lippman’s sultry *noir* novel. Ms. Lippman’s scorching page-turner, indeed, is a slow burn.

*Sunburn* begins in the summer of 1995 in Belleville, a sleepy inland town 45 miles from the Delaware shore. Nursing a drink at the High-Ho bar-slash-restaurant, a man eyes an attractive woman: “It’s the sunburned shoulders that get him. Pink, peeling. Why would a redhead well into her thirties make such a rookie mistake?” The two exchange small talk, but they don’t give their names.

Leaving the High-Ho, the man sits in his truck and watches the woman cross the street to a strip motel called Valley View, “although there’s no valley and no view.” Soon after, he checks into the motel, paying cash up front for a week’s stay.

Invariably, the strangers run into each other at the Valley View. “I’m Adam Bosk,” he says. “Like the pear, only with a ‘k’ instead of a ‘c.’” “I’m the Pink Lady,” she says. “Like the apple.” A regular at the High-Ho, she’s hired as a waitress and remains in town.

Adam fills in as a short-order cook at the High-Ho, just to get closer to her. “What’s your name, Pink Lady?” he asks. Hesitating a moment or two, she answers, “Polly Costello.” Despite his misgivings, Adam is smitten. One thing leads to another, and the two begin a torrid affair.

Late one afternoon, a man named Gregg Hansen storms into the High-Ho, confronting Polly. Gregg calls her “Pauline” and demands that she come home. Clearly, Polly—or Pauline—is a woman with a past who has left a man—or two—in the lurch. A flame-haired *femme fatale*, she’s big trouble. Kathleen Turner in *Body Heat* and Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity* come to mind.

*Sunburn* reaches its sizzling conclusion with unexpected twists. While it's by no means great literature, *Sunburn* just might be the ticket for a hot summer read, lounging beside a cool pool.