

Little Girl Lost

Little Girl Lost tells the story of Detective Robyn Carter and her quest for the truth of a sexual abuse. As a small girl, Alice Formano is sexually assaulted by the son of her mother's boyfriend. The mother, struggling to get back on her feet after Alice's father has died, is unable to cope with losing the life she thinks she deserves. She blames Alice for the fallout that ensues from the sexual assault and the breakdown of her relationship with the assailant's father. She tries to tell her mother what happened, but there is no warmth in her heart.

As the decades pass, the crime is put in the past but it has a way of reaching into the present. The lives of many people were affected, shattered, and altered by the events of that night in Alice's bedroom. Even decades later, the boy has grown into a man but his lusts are still wicked. Detective Robyn Carter stumbles onto the case to break up the monotony of private investigator work. What she finds is a constellation of people who are stuck in that bedroom decades ago.

Little Girl Lost is not episodic in nature. It is a true crime story that has become popular, especially on many streaming services. It has a tone that is reminiscent of *The Night Of* or *The Killing*. The action is not muted or underplayed; instead, the slow burn of the case unfolding is punctuated by acts of brutal violence.

Little Girl Lost starts in the past with the assault of young Alice Formano, but it does not stay in the past. The crime doesn't stay in the past either. The crimes quickly begin to stack up as the plot unfolds. A shadowy figure appears in the first episode to exact a measure of revenge against the assailant's father. Is this figure the adult Alice Formano once again asserting control over her life? Or is this someone else with another ax to grind? It is almost impossible that the young boy only assaulted one girl in his life, and it's unlikely his sick proclivities have abated as he earned more money and status in the world. Did his father cover up for him? What happens in a household when a boy bares the physical scars of the night he abused a girl? Do they talk about it? Do they pretend it didn't happen? What does that do to a developing child?

These are all questions that are posed in the pilot of *Little Lost Girl*. They're not brought to you heavy handed and obvious; instead, they're just elements of the slow burn that orbit the periphery of the story. As Alice Formano begins to find that the story is slowly unrolling before her, the viewer can see the questions beginning to form. The viewer has the same questions.

Another crime, a murder, occurs to end the first episode. This signals to the viewer that the crimes will stretch into the present. However, the viewer doesn't know how to feel about this new crime. Is the person killed an accomplice or an assailant himself? Much like *The Killing*, the entire season is occupied with one crime that is tragic and formative.

Each episode, the pilot included, is broken into four acts. The four act structure offers unique advantages for this type of storytelling. The typical three act structure frames a story as a

beginning, middle, and an end. With a four-act structure, the issue of each episode feels unresolved. An audience has come to expect a set end, even to serial dramas. By creating a four-act structure, *Little Girl Lost* leaves the viewer begging to go to the next episode.

Every good piece of narrative must answer a few questions. It must answer “why now” and “why these people?” When the writer sits down to write or the director begins directing, they must understand the answer to these questions. An audience will intuitively ask themselves these questions as well.

Little Girl Lost quickly answers these questions in the first episode. The story begins at the point it does, so long after the assault, because the father of the assailant is killed. In the world of the episode, it begins because Robyn Carter picks up a new case. She is the answer to “why these people?” The first episode follows Robyn Carter because she is the perfect person for the job. She has the credentials and the skills of a detective, but her job is that of a private investigator at the moment. She has the reasoning and training to pursue the case to its end. However, having credentials other than a police badge puts those she’s questioning at ease.

Robyn’s case beginning in the first episode dovetails with the disappearance of the now-adult assailant. The story begins with a simple missing persons case; he has claimed he’s going to Thailand but his jealous wife finds he has left his passport behind. From there, the story begins to pick up speed. His older wife is something of a surrogate mother, and Robyn Carter is a woman who is seeking answers.

In a story all about people seeking answers, Detective Carter is the perfect answer for “why these people?” Why Robyn? Because she’s looking for answers, just like Alice and all of the other women in the series.

Little Girl Lost is a serial crime drama that subtly subverts the genre. The three-act structure is abandoned in favor of something more unsettling to the viewer. The crime takes place in the past but the assailant and the victim are still present. It’s a cold case, but it’s not a murder. Finally, it’s a cold case, but no one has managed to move on.

Little Girl Lost is destined for a premium channel such as HBO or Starz. It is gritty and raw like many of the shows on Netflix and the structure is designed to leave the viewer hanging. The viewer wants the instant gratification of being able to binge the next episode; however, leaving them to wait a week will make each payoff sweeter.