

Crossings

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(218pp)

978-1-66552-390-5

The bite-sized, playful mysteries of the short story collection Crossings experiment with juicy what-if scenarios and enigmas.

In the short stories of Marsha Carow Markman's *Crossings*, the past and present collide—and the limits of time and space are broken—with uncanny, sometimes irreversible consequences.

Most of these stories are set in and around Boston. They are presented as lost pieces of history—letters, anecdotes, and messages from beyond the grave. The chilling opening tale “The Crossing” relates the story of a haunted house from an unusual point of view. The bittersweet entry “Dream Traveler” chronicles an old woman’s travels into her past via memory; her memories become a reality of their own. The rest of *Crossings* follows a similar pattern: paranormal oddities intrude on the lives of ordinary people.

Crossings contains a generous sampling of genres. Ghost story tropes are at the heart of “Click,” in which an apparition haunts pictures of an old house. “Chameleon” is an eerie science fiction thriller in which a secret experiment results in a man changing his face and identity to avoid his assassins. Still, the vast majority of these yarns center on time-traveling conundrums. “Down the Rabbit Hole” follows a young man from the present day into the basement of a London department store during World War II at the height of the Blitz, thanks to a wrong turn. “The Far Side of Yesterday” and “Impulse” feature eerie twists: people disappear into the past, only to turn up in historical records and newspapers.

The best entries in the collection take advantage of Boston’s history and settings. Fanciful and wry, “On Schemes and Scandals” finds a businessman’s trip derailed by a visit to an old bookstore, a jump back in time to 1919, and an unanticipated meeting with the plotters of the infamous Chicago “Black Sox” baseball scandal. Other tales revel in ambiguity and unresolved mysteries, as with “Telephone Daze,” in which a perpetrator confesses to a long-ago murder after his own death, leading to unsettling ambivalence about the afterlife and its influence on the living.

“Crossings” has fun with its conceits as it hopscotches across space and time; there are supernatural twists at the center of each story. However, a sense of sameness starts to take hold. Most of the tales hit the same beats: introductions from narrators who rue the day their curiosity got the better of them, time-travel twists that become easy to anticipate, and climaxes in which someone leaves their place in history for somewhere in the past or returns to the present. And while the book’s straightforward prose propels each tale forward, it does little to differentiate one story from another.

Crossings is an entertaining, uncanny short story collection full of simple narrative pleasures.

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