

The Hungry and the Haunted: Stories

Rilla Askew

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The intimate short stories of Rilla Askew's *The Hungry and the Haunted* illuminate lives touched by grief, guilt, and social change.

Set in Oklahoma and the American Southwest during the 1970s and told across multiple perspectives, these diverse stories follow outcasts and travelers whose lives and relationships are defined by their settings. The tumult of the era is handled with depth as people grapple with their personal and shared histories, attempting to build new lives from the rubble of grief and tragedy. And particular focus is placed on Southwestern Indigenous people and teenage girls on the outskirts of society.

In one story, an elderly man reckons with his past and his role in the destruction of Indigenous culture. In "Tahlequah Triptych," a family's stories are retold across three generations; it's a compelling exploration of the interconnectedness of a place and its people. Elsewhere, young, grieving women attempt to sever their connections to their pasts, but instead find that they are tethered beyond understanding to their family and terrestrial roots.

The characterizations are rich; they focus on how people contend with the specters of their pasts. Throughout, complicated backstories and deep wounds are addressed with care and delicacy. The prose rides the line between lush and restrained, making careful use of descriptive and metaphorical language to root the stories in their places and times. Subtle details and specificity flesh out this multifaceted portrait of Oklahoma further, preserving a precarious sense of it at a political and social crossroads.

The challenging, beautiful short stories collected in *The Hungry and the Haunted* cover fraught histories that play out in individual lives and linger into the present.

BELLA MOSES (September / October 2024)

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