



The Lost and the Blind

Curtis Smith

Running Wild Press (Sep 5, 2023)

Softcover \$19.99 (288pp)

978-1-955062-61-9

Curtis Smith's lyrical novel *The Lost and the Blind* captures the plights of an addict's son and a father serving a life sentence in prison.

Mark is a disadvantaged teenager who seeks to rise above his hardscrabble upbringing in the dead-end Patch neighborhood of a struggling, drug-addled small town. Political unrest and war loom in the background as he seeks to escape the institutions that failed him.

Steeped in despair, the book captures addiction with gritty authenticity. Telling details evoke glacial histories under the surface, as when Mark's dope-sick mother suggests spending a paycheck on food, prompting her son to ask if she was sure she didn't want to buy junk. And there are frequent allusions to an unnamed war that's not going well, contributing to the suffocating sense of moodiness. The rampant opioid abuse, lack of opportunity, and ever-present conflict result in a dystopian vibe, undercut with scathing social commentary.

Mark is desperate to start a new chapter and escape his ominous, foreboding circumstances. He pushes toward inner peace, even through tragedies. His coming-of-age feels fated—an inescapable outcome of a dysfunctional society that fails its young people.

There are poetic lines—expressions of desire to record a baby's "coos and whimpers before they fade into the farm's green sea"; descriptions of the desperate feeling of "pockets stuffed with kindling and the world aglow in sparks." Staccato sentence fragments form jazzy, impressionistic riffs. There are terse lines, too: Mark notes that his mother "could erase me with a needle." Injections of drug use and smashed car windows burst through the scenes.

In the poignant novel *The Lost and the Blind*, despondent people do their best to escape their burdens.

JOSEPH S. PETE (September / October 2023)

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