

The Missing

Tory Tuttle

Contingency Street Press (May 20, 2023)

Softcover \$12.99 (141pp)

978-1-958015-02-5

The Missing is an insightful short story collection in which people contend with feelings of isolation.

In Tory Tuttle's introspective short story collection *The Missing*, people who live on the unstable margins experience cruelties from others.

A naïve teenage runaway faces abandonment in Salt Lake City. An elementary school custodian witnesses bullying among students and is absorbed by a late-night televised crime movie that his imagination connects to real events. Elsewhere, a mother still grieving the loss of her first, premature child is anxious about her living children and moves through the winter with her breath held, remembering the neonatal intensive care unit. Throughout the stories, people face forms of loss and become numb, even as they maintain their everyday rituals.

The narratives tease at versions of what's missing: a teenager's hoped-for safe relationships, the custodian's ability to care enough to intervene, and a mother's fraying sense of self as the distance between her loss and her present life widens. Their psychological frailty is haunting, and the absences that they experience lead to invisible parallel stories that prompt sometimes unnerving reflections. Recurring themes of pregnancy loss, drifting through tough circumstances, and disconnection further enhance a sense of what's missing—a notion explored through multiple permutations of the word. It's made to represent both grief and the nonexistence of certain essential features, including meaningful support, companionship, or perspective.

In the quirky sketch "The Bridge," a woman's disjointed conversations with her mother lead her to muse on a bridge in disrepair that she can see from her window; her relationship with a mild-mannered man dissipates too. Darker elements emerge in the story of a woman who, while on a public bus, ruminates about her surroundings and befriends a fellow passenger. She's also pregnant and sharing a house with an older woman who has endured serial abandonment. Her conversations reflect her uncertainty. And in "Stranger," a woman's mental health wavers; she hitchhikes, catches a ride with a trucker, and recounts a tale of violence that concludes with an ambiguous suggestion of further harm. The collection's final story, about a mother who experiences disappointment in her marriage, serves as a bookend: much as with the girl in the opening story, its restless heroine's decision leaves her vulnerable.

Filled with crossroad reckonings and populated by sensitive women whose lives are unraveling, *The Missing* is an insightful short story collection in which people contend with feelings of isolation.

KAREN RIGBY (April 11, 2023)

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