



What You've Been Missing (Iowa Short Fiction Award)

Janet Desaulniers

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Populated by characters as frank as their midwestern settings, *What You've Been Missing*, Janet Desaulniers's debut collection, explores the unsettling moments when ordinary life ceases to exist. Parents, confused by their five-year-old's refusal to sit up in her chair, lift her blouse to find she's been beaten. A woman returns from a shopping trip just in time to see her husband kissing a young co-worker. A young husband constructs an elaborate and romanticized version of his new marriage and then ruins it in one gesture. These singular moments propel each person on a journey beyond the realm of everyday existence.

Vividly portraying the possible horrors and detours that can mark anyone's life, Desaulniers beautifully captures the vast and often conflicting emotions that humans endure at times of loss and sorrow—loneliness, pain, desperation, desire. Yet this balletic push and pull of emotions will challenge, wound, and ultimately enlighten her characters, transporting them to a place beyond individual sorrow.

At times unbearably heartbreaking, *What You've Been Missing* is not just another set of stories about bad things happening to good people. At its heart, this award-winning collection is about people continuing to talk—rather than shutting down—as bad things happen to them. As the recently divorced Liza thinks in “The Good Fight”: “Words do ease us. They comfort us. Maybe they protect us in a way, rescue us from the agony of what our bodies feel.”

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