

A Matter of Chance

Julie Maloney

She Writes Press (Apr 10, 2018)

Softcover \$16.95 (368pp)

978-1-63152-369-4

A Matter of Chance is a masterful dramatic mystery that deals with a parent's worst nightmare—having a child go missing.

A woman's attempt to get on with her life following the abduction of her eight-year-old daughter is at the center of Julie Maloney's *A Matter of Chance*, an exquisite portrayal of coming to grips with unimaginable loss.

Maddy Stewart's summer vacation at the shore with her daughter Vinni goes terribly wrong when an older woman they've befriended takes off with the girl. Local police and the FBI are unable to locate them; Maddy, a divorced magazine editor, eventually returns to New York City alone, and must learn to live her new normal as the mother of a missing child.

Maddy narrates. Her pain is evident as she seeks and receives support from a core group: her elderly neighbor, Evelyn, a well-known artist; her ex-best friend, Kay, a prominent attorney; the old-school physician Dr. Goodman; and even John D'Orfini, the detective on her daughter's case.

The story refuses to loosen its grip, even though the days, months, and eventually years slip by. The mind-numbing heartbreak of Maddy's loss is there, along with her determination to solve Vinni's disappearance in any way that she can. She's a devoted mother who never gives up hope—her inner dialogue enlightens and informs, bits of wry humor eventually slipping through the shock and disbelief.

Descriptions of various New York locales add a gritty yet glamorous authenticity to the work. The characters—from Maddy's bossy ex-husband, Steve, a globetrotting environmental attorney, to a German baker, Hannah—are carefully nuanced, even when filtered through Maddy's eyes and perspective.

Maddy's backstory and relationship with her own deceased parents are smoothly and briefly inserted, although it's her relationship with Evelyn, which has mother-daughter tones, that brings Maddy back to the living world as she rediscovers her own passion for painting and uses it as a way to move through her pain. Her painting takes the story in an interesting direction, adding new characters and locations, but never moving too far away from the main plot.

Several subplots deal with ways in which Maddy tries to solve Vinni's disappearance on her own, much to the chagrin of Detective D'Orfini. One or two clues seem to have been missed here—the discovery of undisclosed wealth by a potential kidnapper is mentioned off-handedly, but never apparently followed through on.

Although Vinni is no longer physically present in the text from the first pages, she is always the dominant presence and driving force behind all that Maddy does.

The writing is excellent. Maddy's bewilderment, loss, and pain are etched on every page. Her evolving relationship with the kind and perceptive detective is somewhat anticipated, very sweet, and worth rooting for.

The plot is unique because the focus is entirely on the missing child's parent—little is presented on Vinni herself until the novel's tear-inducing conclusion.

Julie Maloney's *A Matter of Chance* is a masterful dramatic mystery that deals with facing a parent's worst nightmare—having a child go missing.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (March 5, 2018)

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