



## Add This to the List of Things that You Are

**Chris Fink**

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Chris Fink's intricate and melancholic story collection *Add This to the List of Things that You Are* focuses on people in the moments that could come to define them.

Fink's characters seem resigned to their respective fates even as they crash into opportunities to change their perspectives. Not every character ends up being brave. In "Whistle or Lose It," focused on a wedding that is anything but hopeful, the pain of family rejection is a humming tension. "Three P's" explores a man's psyche as he looks for a missing camera and finds an entirely new identity.

In "Trollway," the lead character moves to a new place, settles into a new relationship, and contracts a mysterious rash. With humor, "Writer's Elbow" focuses on a man whose reputation as a writer is more compelling than the thought of actually writing. Many of the shorter pieces focus on the ways that midwestern gender culture hamstring men's emotional development. Pockets of self-expression are the focus of other entries.

Fink excels at creating intense stakes for his characters, whose lives are not considered important in bigger schemes. In one story, a guy with a good job gets a haircut at a barber shop; in another, a group of old, small-town friends go to a Cubs game in Chicago. Most of the stories connect to or distance themselves from Wisconsin, showing invisible tethers to the region, even for those who have traveled far away. Obligations to families or traditions pull on the characters, building excellent, compelling stakes within their routine lives.

The short stories of *Add This to the List of Things that You Are* take a close look at ordinary antiheroes, prompting empathy.

LAURA LEAVITT (September / October 2019)

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