

And Then There Was One

Patricia Gussin

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The poet William Cowper said, “Absence from whom we love is worse than death, and frustrates hope severer than despair.” This perfectly describes the fever pitch of anxiety and fear that pervades Patricia Gussin’s new novel *And Then There Was One*. An interracial family, the scars of the Detroit riots, the New York Yankees, an abduction, and a parent’s worst nightmare—Gussin combines these high-tension elements to weave a compelling mystery that ensnares the reader from the very first page.

Forensic pediatric psychologist Katie Monroe seems to have a charmed life. She’s well-educated, married to former Yankees catcher Scott Monroe, and has a prominent career and identical nine-year-old triplets. It’s a life any woman would envy—and one that is destroyed in an instant. Her three daughters go with their cousin and grandmother to the movies, but only one emerges from the theater. Over the phone, Katie learns that two of her girls have been kidnapped, with no trace and no leads. In a heartbeat, this powerful woman’s world is shattered. “In the end they both sat in front of the cameras, teary eyed and in voices hoarse from endless crying, pleaded for the safe return of their daughters. Both parents had experience with the media, but huddled together, they looked like innocent children themselves, so pathetically scared were they.” In their worry, Katie and Scott try everything to find their missing girls, and end up unraveling their pasts in a desperate search for any clues as to who might have taken them.

Gussin, also the author of *Shadow of Death*, *Twisted Justice*, and *The Test*, is an excellent writer, clearly at ease with her material, and very good at making her readers squirm. She has a deft touch for detail, such as when the remaining triplet, Jackie, overhears her mother talking on the phone. Katie says, “Jackie’s always plotting to be an individual, deep down, she resents being a triplet. That’s why the girls split up at the movie, squabbling over which movie to see, Jackie wanting her own way.” The confrontation that follows is heartbreaking, and shows the deeper layers that Gussin has woven into *And Then There Was One*. At its heart, this novel isn’t just about fear, or abduction—it’s about the million pieces of a family, and the emotional glue that holds people together in crisis. Though occasionally a bit heavy-handed, the diversity of characters shows that there are many sides to any tragedy, and that every member plays a part in a family’s loss.

And Then There Was One is a gripping mystery that will find a toehold in even the most jaded reader’s psyche. Blending elements of social inequality, race, family politics, and the past the Monroes wish they’d left behind, Gussin’s latest is sure to set pulses racing—all the way to the thrilling conclusion.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (September 10, 2010)

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