

ForeWord Reviews

LITERARY

Is This Tomorrow

Caroline Leavitt

Algonquin Books

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Complex characters grapple with loneliness in the wake of tragedy in this author's emotion-driven tenth novel.

“She had lied when she told him there were no ghosts. There most certainly were, and they were right here in this room, haunting her.” A vivid portrait of loneliness, grief, and ultimately healing, Caroline Leavitt’s tenth novel, *Is This Tomorrow*, explores what happens to the people left behind to deal with the ghosts of those who have disappeared or abandoned them.

On a sunny afternoon in 1956, twelve-year-old Jimmy Rearson seemingly vanishes from his suburban Boston neighborhood. Stricken with grief and loss, those closest to him struggle to cope with the fallout of his mysterious disappearance. Rose and Lewis, his sister and best friend, try desperately to hold on to each other until Rose’s mother decides to move to a new city. Lewis’s mother, Ava, already stressed by bills and a threatening ex-husband, is questioned about her close relationship to Jimmy and about her jazz-playing boyfriend, Jake.

Seven years later, each person is trying to make his or her way forward but is held back in part by fear and loss. Leaving a few threads open to reader interpretation, Leavitt explores what it means to truly regain what the past has taken.

Jimmy’s disappearance is the main catalyst for events in the narrative, and the resolution of his mystery opens doors for the plot to move forward. However, the heart and strength of this novel lie not so much in the plot but rather in the characters—the often heartrending ways they try to patch up the holes inside themselves, the triumph of seeing them authentically succeed.

Leavitt renders her characters with deep understanding and gives them complex backstories and characteristics. By the time the second part of the book begins, seven years after Jimmy’s disappearance, Ava, Rose, and Lewis are multidimensional characters whom readers understand completely.

While grappling with loneliness and the after-effects of tragedy are central to the novel, Leavitt also explores what it means to be in a relationship, the complexity of families and

parenthood, and the difficulties of finding and believing in oneself.

A few revelations regarding the mystery of Jimmy's disappearance seem to be more symbolically and thematically significant than entirely unexpected, but generally as the book closes, readers will feel that the lives of the characters are about to open up to entirely new chapters. Fans of Leavitt's work will want to see this latest offering, and new readers, drawn in by Leavitt's emotional portraits and easy style, may find a new author to love.

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