



Left

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In the taut and compelling *Left*, a small, troubled universe of friends, family, and lovers tries to find twenty-nine-year-old Natasha Bell, whose disappearance on a stormy summer night left few clues and a mystery that may never be solved.

Natasha disappears in 2002; through anguish and confusion, the story continues for more than a decade, shifting between Natasha's younger sister, her best friend, and her ex-boyfriend. Space is also given to Natasha herself, up to the July night when she left dinner in the Crock-Pot and went out for her run.

Natasha's character is skillfully broadened through the impressions of those close to her and through her own reflections. A Calgary trauma nurse, she is capable, nurturing, health-conscious, and particularly protective of her pregnant teenage sister. Natasha is also complex and conflicted, however, yearning for a happy marriage and children of her own.

Among the engrossingly disturbing details that follow Natasha's disappearance are the bloodhounds and volunteer search parties retracing her path, the *Find Natasha Bell* website, and the annual gatherings held on the date she went missing. The detective on the case also joins the narrative, determined to blame the incident on Natasha's former boyfriend, Greg. Greg soon finds himself living in a constant state of anxiety, with insomnia and weight loss adding to the hollowness he already feels without Natasha.

With the varied round of voices, including a sinister individual known simply as "Him," *Left* succeeds in drawing its narrow, dark universe. Even in her absence, Natasha becomes a believable, likable character, and much more than a victim. The novel deepens the actual continued presence of a "missing person" as well, especially as the years pass, with loved ones living in a purgatory of hope and fear, waiting for a miracle—or simply the solemn relief of closure.

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