

Missing Isaac

Valerie Fraser Luesse

Revell (Jan 2, 2018)

Softcover \$14.99 (352pp)

978-0-8007-2878-6

Inspiring themes emerge of cultivating self worth and of the necessity of defending those who are otherwise defenseless.

Valerie Fraser Luesse revisits 1960s Alabama with searing clarity in *Missing Isaac*, an elegiac tribute to friendship. A familial, intimate side of an era is memorably drawn through a cast of upstanding characters led by Pete McLean, a teenager who experiences love and grief while moving across social worlds.

A linear plot highlights small-town politics, faith, cruelty, injustice, and the different ways individuals shoulder their histories of loss. Pete stands out as a particularly forthright, transparent young man caught between the ill wind that sweeps through rural Glory and his everyday life.

Pete is bereft at the death of his father, and later at the disappearance of Isaac Reynolds, a field hand who works for his family. Determined to find resolution, he sets out on a search for Isaac. Along the way, he meets Dovey Pickett, a backwoods girl with sorrows of her own. Their friendship turns to love over the course of several years.

Luesse deftly infuses an otherwise dark story with grace. The search for Isaac never dominates, serving as a haunting background note that brings together the families of Pete, Isaac, and Dovey. It's in the story of the Picketts—who have long felt themselves to be outsiders in the community—that hope takes root.

As characters learn to depend on one another, inspiring themes emerge of cultivating self worth and of the necessity of defending those who are otherwise defenseless. Dovey's father, John, is especially intriguing as he works to reconcile his loyalty to his clan with his dreams of taking a different path.

At times, the book is an idealized romance. Pete's flaws, such as caring too deeply, pose few genuine problems. His willingness to work for Dovey's companionship—in a thread that echoes the biblical story of Rachel and Jacob—also underscores an unusual depth of maturity. Still, their relationship highlights prejudices, fears, and the healing that can come from allowing vulnerabilities to show.

When the mystery behind Isaac's disappearance is revealed, it comes with hard-won resolve on the part of the townsfolk who are left to mourn him. *Missing Isaac* beautifully elucidates how good things can arise even in the midst of painful trials.

KAREN RIGBY (January/February 2018)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.