

Not Anywhere, Just Not

Ken Sparling

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In Ken Sparling's meditative, quizzical novel *Not Anywhere, Just Not*, a woman searches for meaning after her husband's mysterious disappearance.

An aging couple leads a quiet life, referring to themselves as "the boy and the girl." Then the boy disappears without a word or explanation. In their world, others have disappeared too: some never return; others return years or decades later, with no recollection of where they've been.

Left alone, the girl contemplates the boy's absence and her identity without him. Because the boy always did the shopping and cooking, she's frightened to go to the grocery store, but forces herself to buy cat food and toilet paper. As the months pass, she spends her days tending to the cat, watching the birds and garbage men come and go, and reading the stacks of journals the boy left behind. The latter are full of stories about Dick and "the little girl he hasn't seen since he was ten." Sometimes she looks for the "new god" who lives on Sunnydale Boulevard.

In this cerebral novel, the girl's life is insular; there is no mention of friends, family, or a career. The narrative mulls over her memories and her isolation: she is falling "like a waterfall with no river below it" and feels "the jagged edge of his shrinking away from her like a knife blade gently scoring her skin." At times, she wonders if she has disappeared into an alternate universe. The descriptions of loss and grief are lyrical and inventive. Still, some may wish that this girl who has "a closet full of colourful outfits waiting" would snap out of her reverie and act.

Not Anywhere, Just Not is a rhythmic, brooding novel in which a woman whose life was intertwined with her husband's searches for an identity after his loss.

KRISTEN RABE (May / June 2023)

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