

## Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club

**Megan Gail Coles**

House of Anansi Press (Sep 22, 2020)

Softcover \$17.95 (440pp)

978-1-4870-0171-1

Timed to match pushed-down pains reemerging, *Small Game Hunting at the Local Coward Gun Club* is a blistering novel that reveals deep social rifts.

In a Newfoundland blizzard on Valentine's Day, malcontent townspeople gather at the Hazel, the one restaurant that's decided to stay open despite the storm. They are a mix of the wealthy and well-established, everyday patrons, and waitstaff. Their stream-of-consciousness reflections guide the book through its long day, revealing deep-seated and festering wounds.

Iris is an artist, the Hazel's hostess, and the novel's lead; she's been so emptied by her affair with John, the Hazel's chef, that she can no longer feel everyday beauty. A bay girl, she's subject to judgment and microaggressions from those who did not grow up poor and Native, who speak to her "as if having more is reflective of being more." Around Iris hovers Olive, her unclaimed half sister who is functioning in a haze, having recently survived a brutal gang rape. Damian, the Hazel's busser, lost his true love, Tom, because he hesitated to confront Olive's rapists; patrons Calv and Roger are respectively an enabler and the ringleader of Olive's assault.

George, the restaurant's wealthy owner and John's wife, sees more than she's willing to admit, while John takes advantage of women's romantic sensibilities, recycling wooing words and balancing his cheating with gaslighting. As John tries to keep George and Iris apart, Damian works to keep his rage toward Calv and Roger at bay. Searing reflections on established inequalities emerge as the day progresses, all working toward a tragic implosion.

Megan Gail Coles's novel is blunt and veracious, tracking the events of a single day as they reveal the lasting social impacts of emotional and systemic violence.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September / October 2020)

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