ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

The Lost Girls
Lin Hendler
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This chilling tale of girls, not growing up, but merely existing in Los Angeles and its environs, is not your mother's coming-of-age tale. Caught between bulimia, cocaine, and heroin, the girls traverse the dangerous territory of hopelessness: empty houses (however palatial these are), abandoned parks, and tired old diners where key lime pie is on the menu. "I like key lime pie," one girl says, "because it is fake. It has no place in reality." The girls numb themselves to escape their need for someone, anyone, to be there for them. Parents are either not around at all, are crazy, or have lives so stretched by work or the craven need for the right house, the right body, or the right relationship that they are only on the periphery of their daughter's lives.

So, too, are the men in the story. Boyfriends are almost missing, yet their power over the girls' lives is still felt. When a man on the Paris Metro cops a feel of two of the girls, these very modern young women "silently make excuses for him." One of them feels perhaps the train bumped her into him. The other wonders if perhaps her skirt is too short. Later, one of them says, "We're so ready and willing to take the blame." Her companion and best girlfriend replies, "We're both a couple of lost girls. And that's why I love you. So there, someone does love you."

That is the crux of the matter. Frantic to find meaning in life, they plunge into drugs, recreational sex, and relationships, and finally are washed up on a barren shore facing their own desperation. Love is so palpably missing in these girls' lives that they hardly even touch each other, passing by in the darkness of their own cruel fortune to be born female in a city where even perfection isn't good enough.

With a bachelor's from Reed College, this promising young author attended the graduate program of Medieval Studies in York, England. This is her first novel, and she tells it in chapters that jump from character to character, from third-person to first-person point of view, with changes of scene, and even changes in tense, all handled with supreme authority. *Lost Girls* haunts the reader. On a Halloween outing, one of the girls states, "When snakes get really sick, they do something called 'stargazing.' When we get really sick, we die. I mean, what would you rather do? Die, or stargaze?" Moments like this flow through the book, in the same way the

motion of a manta ray drifts through quiet ocean, hypnotic, leading the reader onward through the girls' desire for hope, a wish that is so poignant it is painful, yet the reader does not want to put the book down, reluctant to miss these moments of a beauty that aches.

Carol Lynn Stewart