

The Missing Morningstar: And Other Stories

Stacie Shannon Denetsosie

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The artful stories of Stacie Shannon Denetsosie's unflinching collection *The Missing Morningstar* are set in the Navajo Nation, where people who struggle to overcome adversity often derive comfort from their community's traditions.

Focusing on the lives of young people—most often women—living on the “rez,” these stories include instances of domestic violence, abduction, and murder, though of perhaps greater weight are the ways in which people's traditions and relationships foster connections to what's bigger, stronger, and indestructible. Their prose is striking and lyrical, including descriptions of a “salmon-bellied sky,” a girl wearing “so much turquoise jewelry she sounded like a walking penny jar,” and a grandfather whose “hands were rough as splinters.”

In “The Casket in the Backseat,” a boy communes with his grandfather's spirit and gains knowledge that helps him to comfort his mother. In “Wool Dolls,” a girl misses out on her woman-becoming ceremony and engages in casual sex, thinking that the latter is a way to prove that she has become a woman.

In “Snow Bath,” a woman follows the dictates of her dead mother's voice coming from an Alexa speaker and drives to the mountains. She sheds her clothes and submerges in a snowbank in a Navajo ritual to teach endurance. And in “Reservation State of Mind,” a girl who's at a gas station to buy snacks grieves for her murdered brother, though she also recalls a time, while she was sitting in her brother's truck, when he talked about his girlfriend: “I choked her. Sher, I hit her, and I didn't stop.”

Altogether, the poignant stories of *The Missing Morningstar* represent a world of people searching for love, fulfillment, and belonging.

KAREN MULVAHILL (September / October 2023)

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