



The Things We Miss

Leah Stecher

Bloomsbury Children's Books (May 7, 2024)

Hardcover \$17.99 (288pp)

978-1-5476-1302-1

A middle schooler who's struggling with self-acceptance believes her problems are solved when she finds a magic door in Leah Stecher's novel *The Things We Miss*.

J.P. dreads seventh grade and all it represents. With some cajoling from her grandfather, Pop Pop, she makes it to school, where she is confronted by her fears. While wishing for a means to escape the bullying, she discovers a magic doorknob in her neighbor's tree house; turning it leads to another world. She shares her fun escape with her best friend, Kevin, who is a gay Japanese fashion enthusiast. But using the door soon turns into an addiction. Gradually, J.P. detaches from the real world; she is blinded to what's happening in the lives of her loved ones too. She ends up missing out on the good parts of life while running from the bad. In time, she has to pursue self-reflection, healing, and growth.

J.P. is a lovable heroine whose story exposes the subtle and blatant ways that people are size shamed, including via pitying looks, careless comments, and unsolicited diet recommendations. Through her organic conversations, she covers sensitive topics including mental health, body positivity, difficult home lives, and the emotional strain caused by the loss of a loved one. The prose is humane and expressive in covering J.P.'s work toward self-acceptance and self-love; it also exposes the constant mockery of her peers and her tendency toward self-criticism. Her struggles will be familiar regardless of one's age, helping to make her eventual awakening, albeit due to painful circumstances, satisfying.

In the resonant novel *The Things We Miss*, a girl learns that running away doesn't solve problems, and that being present is an act of love.

GABRIELLA HARRISON (May / June 2024)

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