

The Town Crazy

Suzzy Roche

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Rumors and jealousy have irreparable consequences in Suzzy Roche's novel, *The Town Crazy*.

People love to gossip in Hanzloo, Pennsylvania: about Lil, who hasn't been out of the house all summer; about Luke, who just moved from New York for unknown reasons; and about Luke's son, Felix, an odd, friendless child. A lack of facts and an abundance of rumors leave the townsfolk primed to believe the worst about the unwell and the unconventional in their midst.

The book is set in 1961, and its characters play out their personal dramas amid a backdrop of religious guilt and petty cruelties. Lil, who's unable to care for her daughter, Alice, because of her depression, is pressured into letting Alice stay with a neighbor, Clarisse. But Clarisse's motives are not as pure as she tells herself they are. She swings between confidence in her position as queen bee and deep-rooted insecurity that threatens to upend multiple lives. Sister Annunciata, a nun at the town church, serves as a much-needed voice of reason, but even she can allow personal biases to affect her judgment.

The story culminates with the church's Halloween party, where all of the characters gather. What was supposed to be a night of fun and friendly competition becomes the site of unexpected endings and fateful decisions. The entire town is left reeling in the aftermath. While some learn from the past, others can't accept that being kind for the wrong reasons is just as bad as not being kind at all, and that some wrongs are too great to be put right. Some manage to pick up the pieces and move on; others are doomed to remain in the same, unsatisfying ruts.

The Town Crazy is an absorbing novel about how damaging hasty assumptions and misplaced discretion can be.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (September / October 2020)

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