

★ **What Isn't Remembered****Kristina Gorcheva-Newberry**

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Bridging Russia, New York City, and Virginia, the short stories of Kristina Gorcheva-Newberry's *What Isn't Remembered* are filled with uneasy relationships that are doomed by the accretion of personal and cultural histories.

Plumbing the confluence of pride, pain, and desire among those who struggle with the persistence of their choices, histories, and very natures, the book's characters are burdened by inescapable connections, and are transfixed by circumstances and echoes of the past. In these stories, presence is measured by absence, connection by loss, and happiness through misery. Death and funerals are frequent, as are other types of departures and separations between the living and the familiar. Like their tellers, the book's jokes are grim, absolute, and raw. But between the brutal absurdity of life and the perfection of death, there's a sense that you must laugh, because you'll cry if you don't.

Even when engrossed in what's finite, the book excels at juxtapositions without resolutions, that stretch and linger long after their stories are finished. In "Lullaby for My Father," a woodworker with cancer abandons building his own coffin to protest the Armenian genocide in front of the Turkish embassy. And "The Heart of Things" ends with the image of a girl in a tree, staring through the window, her face and mouth pressed against the glass, speaking without sound to the adults inside as they reapply makeup on a corpse. These stories know that "death gives meaning to everything....It gives each living moment its beauty and its horror."

The stories of *What Isn't Remembered* run an emotional marathon. They are virtuosic, bold, and unsparing as they talk about "history and personal experiences, hunger and pain as [we continue] living through them, as though nothing ever ended but coexisted in parallel worlds."

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (September / October 2021)

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