

3-25-2021

Poverty, escape combine in new literary thriller

"The Hare"

Melanie Finn
Two Dollar Radio, 2021

Rosie Monroe, orphaned at five, has grown up in the working-class, loveless household of her grandmother in Lowell, MA. In 1983, her artistic talents gain her a full scholarship to Parsons School of Design. A lonely freshman feeling out of place in Parsons' artsy atmosphere, Rosie goes to the MoMA one Sunday morning to console herself with paintings. There, she meets Bennett Kinney, a handsome, sophisticated man with whom she has a "real" conversation. He is 38. She is 18. Soon (the reader might add, 'inevitably') she falls in love and joins him in the renovated boathouse of an estate on Connecticut's "Gold Coast." She is thrilled by his purported acquaintance with famous writers. She reads the books he recommends and learns social skills (how to eat soup and refer to yachts only as "boats") so she won't embarrass him in public. She doesn't know how he earns a living, and occasionally she's sure things he has done are wrong. But Bennett has made her trust her morals as little as her manners, and he doesn't respond well to her timid objections - and besides, she's pregnant. She drops out of Parsons and has a baby girl, Miranda.

Her happiness ends late one night when Bennett suddenly loads her, Miranda, and a few clothes into his BMW and escapes a police raid by minutes. Their long escape ends at an abandoned house in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, near Bennett's purported "teaching job at a prestigious college." He is increasingly absent, leaving Rosie and Miranda seven miles from town, with no car, no telephone, no winter clothes, a wood stove she doesn't know how to light, no firewood, and no income. Finn brilliantly portrays Vermont's rural beauty, which Rosie discovers with delight, juxtaposed with rural poverty, its depth as foreign to her as the lives of Connecticut billionaires. In real danger of starvation



One-Minute
Book Reviews
Laura Stevenson



as the lives of Connecticut billionaires. In real danger of starvation as Bennett's absences lengthen and his lies multiply, Rosie is saved by her neighbor Billy (Williamina), who teaches her to split kindling, to drive, to shoot and dress deer, to forage in the woods. But starvation is the least of Rosie's worries; she discovers that Bennett is in cahoots with (and in debt to) a pedophilic drug dealer who looks longingly at 20-month-old Miranda. In this dystopian pastoral landscape, smuggling becomes her only way to preserve her child from molestation, sex becomes her only way to afford winter tires, cooking the books becomes a way of borrowing money, murder becomes the only preservative from exploitation, and lying its necessary adjunct. Rosie manages to raise Miranda, who goes on to a successful life, but she has done so at the expense of tremendous (and unappreciated) parental sacrifice.

The feminism of "The Hare" is present overtly in Rosie's initial submission to Bennett and in her later

diatribes against men's exploitation of women. Less openly but more powerfully, it appears in Rosie's friendship with lesbian Billy and, in the last third of the book, in Rosie's reunion with a transgender version of a long-forgotten high school friend. Most powerful of all, however, is Rosie's unending battle to escape the choice she made in her teens. As she puts it to a teenaged boy in the book's concluding pages, "There are moments, fullcrums upon which our entire lives depend. When we're young we don't see these, we don't understand their rarity. We think we have endless possibilities. We don't understand the suction of time." Rosie's compelling story is symbolized by the hare she finds frozen under her porch, having sought refuge after fleeing, wounded but untracked, from a hunter. "It lay in an attitude of action, legs stretched out, ears back, still running—a permanent and futile pose of escape."

This is a thrilling, deeply sad book.

adhouse



Reservations
appreciated

d & Spirits

INNER 2-7PM
RESERVATIONS

Turkey Dinner \$17.95

Prime Rib of Beef

d Saturday
n the Pub

NS REQUESTED
CALL FOR ORDERS TO GO

Monday 5 pm

y & Wednesday
Old Ark Road, Wilmington, VT