*Missing Persons,* by Stephanie Carpenter rev. by Nicholas Sanchez

Press 53

At times, collections of short stories can appear to have recycled environments or situations, leaving the reader to feel like they’ve never truly left the story prior. With *Missing Persons,* Stephanie Carpenter’s debut collection, this is not the case. Each story in *Missing Persons* acts as an exposé into the inner workings of a wide range of characters and situations, and each character is so starkly different from the next that their only similarity is the riveting insight into their lives as told by Carpenter.

Carpenter’s stories seem entirely unique and unrelated to the others leaving the reader feeling as if they are in a new world with each new story. Her stories focus on very real and palpable instances of life. These are the stories of our neighbors and friends and possibly even our own. “Witnesses” is about a young boy living a fatherless life in a trailer only to be comforted by a local girl and her obsession with soap operas. The story’s tone is one of intrigue as the reader discovers the young boy’s world alongside him through a sense of relative naiveté. The story, “Mr. Codman’s Women”, is a world of grandeur and firearms as an older gentleman struggles to juggle his life between his mistresses and his estranged daughter. Carpenter’s ability to create distinct worlds is accompanied by her exceptional choice of words that blur the line between short story and poetry. On page 65 beginning of the story *The Mission*, “Once there was a girl, who pressed her ear to the wall and listened to the tick, tick inside of it. Once there was a family story: grandparents, a farmhouse, a faulty toaster turning everything to ash.” What’s more important are the resolutions that Carpenter reaches at the end of each story. With clear impacts and an effective development of characters the reader is able to even, at times, not just empathize but also relate to Carpenter’s many distinguished characters.

*Missing Persons* is an exciting collection that is difficult to put down. With the various situations Carpenter explicates so well, it is conceivable that any given person can seem themselves in one of these stories. I highly recommend this collection of short stories and look forward to the future works for Stephanie Carpenter.