

This bracing, incisive collection of 12 short stories immerses readers in the lives of characters who, as the title suggests, find themselves disconnected from the world and people around them while facing personal struggles and disappointments—plus social workers, security guards, awkward tennis partners, and more. Each entry delves into the sharply delineated life of a character trying to navigate an existence that’s not working out how they expected, like the former stunt performer who now sells insurance, or the street-reporting journalist facing the death of great weekly papers, as Harris, a documentary filmmaker (*Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport*) and author, finds fresh, pained perspectives on feelings of being alienated or left behind.

The opener, “Land Mines,” quickly seizes attention as protagonist Dana is caught shoplifting a scarf at Bloomingdales and forced to visit a psychiatrist to deal with her problem. The crisp, potent prose that showcased her background—she was abandoned by her mother as a child, and a boyfriend in later years, and finds shoplifting a surprise source of instant gratification—exemplifies Harris’s concision and humanity. Those qualities likewise power “The Mink Coat,” in which a woman moves back to Chicago after separating from her husband and finds surprising freedom through a coat gifted to her by her mother. “Tikkun Olam” and “Chicken Soup” plumb different spectrums of loneliness, the first centered on a troubled teenager craving family, and the second a woman abandoned by her children. Not that family life is easier: the standout “Mute” finds a couple at odds over how to parent a boy diagnosed with autism.

The cast is diverse, but alienation unites them. Pained and resonant, *Misfits* lays bare people who are so convincingly drawn that they seem to be reported on rather than imagined. Harris breathes life into his characters by employing evocative imagery and succinct storytelling. He lets his characters express themselves not only through dialogues, but also through actions.

Takeaway: Urgent, incisive short fictions of people facing lives that aren’t quite working out.

Comparable Titles: Patrick Dacey’s *We’ve Already Gone This Far*, Adam Haslett’s *You Are Not a Stranger Here*.

Production grades

Cover: **A_**

Design and typography: **A**

Illustrations: **N/A**

Editing: **A**

Marketing copy: **A**