

Misfits

Mark Jonathan Harris

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The short stories in *Misfits* live up to the book's title by outlining the dilemmas, perceptions, and reactions of people who don't quite fit the mold of convention. Each features atmospheric contrasts of troubled personalities who face life-changing encounters.

Take the arrival of an unexpected gift in 'The Mink Coat,' for one example. Narrator Brenda has long been estranged from her mother, but the arrival of her mother's most prized possession creates a rift in one relationship even as it applies the salve of memory and connection to another.

Mark Jonathan Harris portrays the journey of this mink coat and its underlying impact with a fine attention to life changes and defiance. This lends the coat additional impact and meaning as Brenda moves into other life circumstances:

"Unlike Montreal, divided by class and language and ideology, Chicago was a place where contradictions were more easily tolerated, where rich and progressive weren't viewed as antithetical, where you could wear expensive Italian boots and still rail against capitalism. Here my mink evoked admiration, not scorn."

The cost of a coat given to a daughter who has been disavowed, and the family connections it represents, are thoughtfully endowed with energy and insight as the story progresses.

In contrast, 'Chicken Soup' weaves a cultural food battle into its relationship examination, probing a surly employer's struggles with her employee over food, life, and choices.

Ignoring Rose's daily insults becomes one of the efforts Amelia must make in order to satisfy her obligations and moral charge, which includes taking care of herself:

"She can't let a crotchety old woman who has stopped caring about life drag her into misery."

Each story presents a different type of misfit, psychological profiles that are tested by adversity and unexpected encounters, and personal challenges that lead to both alienation and unexpected consequences for decision-makers placed in impossible roles.

The result is a collection especially highly recommended for students of literary psychological works. Steeped in the definition and persona of the misfit's adaptive process to life experiences,

each story represents a vivid inspection that deserves widespread attention, book club debate, and library recommendation.

D.Donovan, Senior Reviewer, Midwest Book Review