



Ghosted: A Love Story by Jenn Ashworth

Review by Phaedra Ritchie

Rivington and Blackrod High School

Key Stage 4 Highly Commended Portico Sadie Massey Awards Key Stage 4
Reading Winner 2022

This compelling and thorough story shows the unsettling livelihood of thirty-eight-year-old Laurie. Jenn Ashworth portrays her as an apathetic and closed off woman, the disappearance of her husband Mark impacts her in the strangest of ways. The story is cleverly laced with dark humour, all the while portraying the perils of loss and loneliness. Laurie's is an indecisive and awkward woman, unintentionally upsetting the last few support systems that surround her.

Within the exposition of the novel, we are immediately introduced to the dynamic of Laurie and Mark's marriage, subtly hinting at the broken relationship. Ashworth signifies the impassive essence of their marriage in the mechanical way the two acts towards each other. They're perceived to be extremely different; Laurie reluctantly describes their morning procedure begrudgingly narrating her sex with Mark. How they both don't speak and although they are physically intimate, emotionally they are worlds apart. Following this, as Laurie drifts through her day, the author shows Laurie's intentional ignorance to her unhappiness. Her interactions with people are soulless and meaningless. Once she returns home, she's faced with an empty flat, the realisation hitting her that her husband is gone.

Laurie's reaction to Mark's disappearance is abnormal, for five weeks she neglects coming to terms with what's happened, simply drifting through her days. It's only out of sheer force and reluctance that she finally decides to report the disappearance to the police. Laurie is criticised by those around her for the poor way she handballed the situation. She's so alone and her struggles are significant.

One truly endearing character is Olena, who cares for Laurie's father who suffers with dementia. I found myself admiring Olena and her strong-willed nature. Her ability to mediate and pacify any predicament being one of her best qualities. Laurie has an unsteady relationship with Olena, at first Laurie feels malevolent and docile to her, yet as Laurie's depression increases, she's able to find similarities and a deep connection with her, finally proving Laurie's with a substantial and fulfilling bond.

On the other hand, Laire's husband Mark reflects the explicit and neglectful qualities that men can possess within their relationships with women. He reflects how within society men always get away with things, the blame always being put on women. This could have been referring to the feminist perspective as there are parallels to how people react to Laire telling them about Mark's disappearance, everyone's prime reaction is to assume Laire was the reason for him leaving. Ashworth was creating this idea that no matter what Laire could have said, as a woman she'll always be condemned even when she isn't at fault. No one has any regard for Laire's emotions, only about Mark's. As well as this, the idea of the feminist's perspective and the second sex (by Simone De Beauvoir) is further perpetuated with Laire's internal battle inside with how she's wanting to act to fill the needs of Mark, and that she's feeling validation through letting him have his own way. With his absence, the readers observe Laire's emotional turmoil as she faces reality and sees how she was leaving her life for Mark, not herself. She is constantly held to high standards, as she's seen as this accessory to Mark's life, rather than her own person. Causing her to be unsure of how to function once the man in her life has gone.

Laire's father highlights the ignorance and toxicity found within families. He's an example of feeling compelled to associate with crude, abhorrent people because you're simply blood related. Laire feels indifferent to her father, yet she feels forced to visit him in his old age. She falls victim to her father's harsh remarks and his dated ideas about the world. Laire's relationships with men are cold, distant, and uncommunicative. While her connections with women are complex and messy yet pure and supportive.

The story's climax is spontaneous, and the author showed Laire's epiphany as she sees the value within herself and she learns to exist on her own, without the need for Mark. She is now her own person, ready to tell her own story.

This story has emerged into one of my favourite books, it expresses the inequality and neglect within marriages and Ashworth shows how loneliness and emotion causes a person to face the life they live, realising the negative aspects wholeheartedly.

