

*Still Missing* by Chevy Stevens

(St. Martin's Press July 6, 2010)

I would not have thought this was the author's debut novel it is that good. Stevens writes as if she has been doing it for years. Her words propelled me through the book—the action and suspense at times had me anxious, while the heart-wrenching sorrow caused me to tear up. Thrillers are like roller coasters, taking the reader up that long, terror-inducing climb and then sending you plummeting uncontrollably down the face of a steep cliff.

In the book, Stevens writes in first person point of view. This difficult approach, particularly for a first time novelist, allows the reader to get into the head of the protagonist. Done correctly, it allows the reader to feel everything the character is feeling. In *Still Missing*, Stevens does a marvelous job of allowing her readers to see, hear, smell, and feel the sheer terror that the main character, Annie O'Sullivan, must endure.

O'Sullivan is a realtor abducted at an open house she is hosting at one of her properties. This is not only a believable premise, but also one this reviewer has seen happen in the past. It highlights the vulnerability of female realtors to deranged individuals bent on evil. Stevens does an excellent job of not only demonstrating this fact, but also shares with the reader the destruction of the victim's psyche after the event occurs. In a sense, the book serves as a warning to women in the real estate profession that assaults and abductions are a real possibility.

Another unique writing technique the author demonstrates, is she recounts her tale of terror to her psychiatrist, also utilizing first person. Throughout the book this duality exists: the abduction and aftermath, as well as the sessions with the doctor. The two stories run in tandem, and it is done well. It is interesting that while describing the appointments with her doctor, Stevens never really describes her doctor in much detail. The most we learn is that the psychiatrist is an older female who dresses well, but the brevity and lack of information works.

While this could have been a book with few characters other than the protagonist and antagonist, Stevens nevertheless invented a few interesting ones. The bad guy is referred to as, "The Freak." She paints a comprehensive picture of him as the book progresses, and in describing one of the cops handling her case she does so in this manner: "He looked solid. Calm. If this guy had been on the Titanic, he'd have finished his coffee." Great writing.

One drawback for this reviewer was the attempt to make the protagonist appear tough by using profanity. For me it was a little overdone. I think Annie's character would be better served with an occasional expletive—I get that's she's a strong woman based on her pain and tolerance levels.

The book contains some surprising twists and turns, the ending coming out of left field—I never expected it. It was a pleasure to read; it is one of those books where you're relieved when it ends, yet sad that it has. *Still Missing* is a well-written, fast-paced, emotion-grabbing read. This one should win some awards.