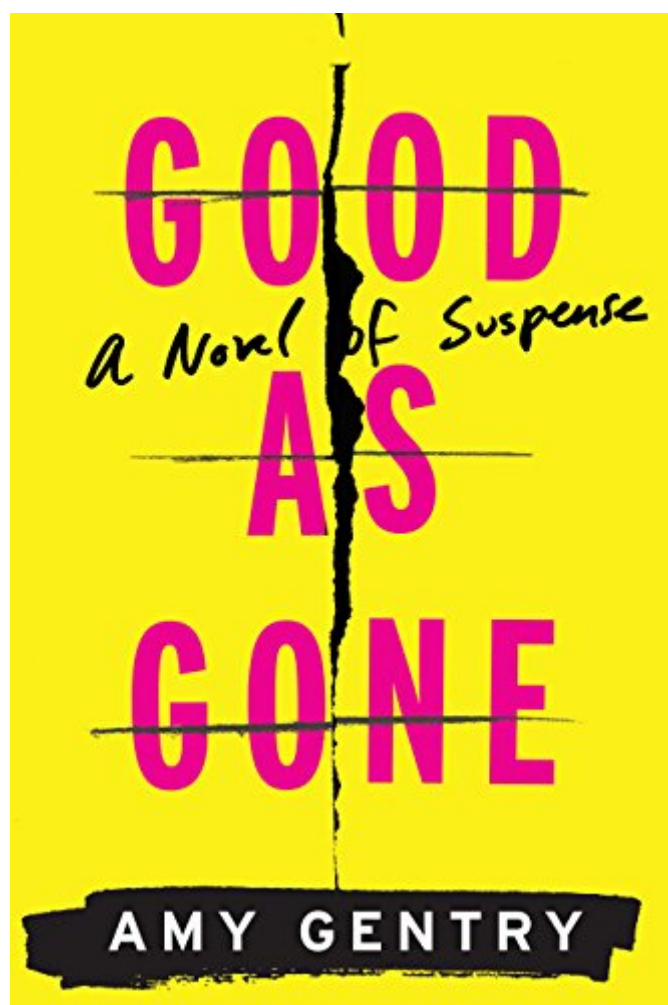


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Good As Gone



Synopsis

Thirteen-year-old Julie Whitaker was kidnapped from her bedroom in the middle of the night, witnessed only by her younger sister. Her family was shattered, but managed to stick together, hoping against hope that Julie is still alive. And then one night: the doorbell rings. A young woman who appears to be Julie is finally, miraculously, home safe. The family is ecstatic—but Anna, Julie's mother, has whispers of doubts. She hates to face them. She cannot avoid them. When she is contacted by a former detective turned private eye, she begins a torturous search for the truth about the woman she desperately hopes is her daughter. Propulsive and suspenseful, *Good as Gone* will appeal to fans of *Gone Girl* and *The Girl on the Train*, and keep readers guessing until the final pages.

Book Information

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Mystery

Customer Reviews

My rating: 3.5 of 5 stars
It's so easy to forget how terrible the world is. Tragedy reminds us. It is purifying in that way. But when it starts to fade, you have to return to the source, over and over.
When Julie Whitaker was just 13 years old, she was walked silently out of her house by

knifepoint. The last person to see her alive was her 10 year old sister, Jane. Eight years have gone by and the time for hope, hope that Julie could ever be found, has long since passed. A knock on their door one night just may prove that there is always a reason to keep hoping: Julie finally found her way home. Or did she? The girl at the front door is about the same age as Julie would be and looks like how they imagine she would, but after 8 years, how do you really know? She tells stories of being held captive, of being raped, of being kept at a drug lords compound in Mexico. But something about her entire story rings false and as the story continues unfolding, more suspicions arise. If this isn't Julie, who is it and what could she possibly gain from pretending to be someone she's not? If there is something missing if I am afraid to love her quite as much as before it is only because the potential for love feels so big and so intense that I fear I will disappear in the expression of it, that it will blow my skin away like clouds and I will be nothing. It's clear that the inspiration for this story came from Elizabeth Smart's tragic story, but Gentry's debut novel impressively builds off inspiration and stands strong on its own merits. To me, the definition of a good mystery is one that continues to keep you riveted while also keeps you guessing.

It has been eight years since Julie, then only 13 years old, was kidnapped from her family's home under the terrified gaze of her younger sister, Jane, hiding in a hallway closet, by a man holding a knife to her throat. Then, on the same day that Jane returns home midway through her freshman year of college trailing a bunch of incomplete coursework, the doorbell rings. There stands a young woman. It's Julie -- or is it? Anna and Tom, her parents, certainly instantly welcome her back and the family is together again. Until... inconsistencies emerge. And then a private detective contacts Anna to share some disturbing information. Meanwhile, we, the readers, already know there is more to Julie's story than the dramatic tale of kidnapping and sex slavery she has told investigators, because the novel is recounted in through alternating perspectives, with Anna's first-person narrative taking up much of the story but alternating with the third person perspective of Julie -- if that is, indeed, who she is. It's that mother/daughter relationship -- or whatever kind of relationship it is -- that is by far the strongest part of Amy Gentry's novel. It has the element of passionate hope and love on Anna's part, and the tension and suspicion and wariness lingering around the fringes of those emotions. The other two family members, Tom and Jane, don't get the same amount of attention, which is a bit of a pity; they end up feeling a bit underdeveloped. That said, Anna's will to believe that her elder daughter has been returned to her (compared to her struggles to relate to her younger daughter) are powerful and convincingly captured.

Amy Gentry's "novel of suspense," currently titled *Good as Gone*, offers a compelling blend of mystery and mother-daughter dynamics. Once I started reading, I had a hard time putting it down. The premise: Julie, who vanished from her home at age 13, returns at age 21 to a family -- mom, dad, sister -- that had never expected to see her again. But...is it really Julie or an imposter, and if so, why? The book then splits into two parallel narratives. Mom Anna, a university professor, steps the reader through the process of first welcoming her long-lost daughter and then beginning to question not just the identity of "Julie" but other aspects of her life and roles as a mother and wife. Her story, told in first person, rolls forward chronologically with many flashbacks. The counterpoint to Anna's narration is the third-person account, seen from the perspective of the young woman who calls herself Julie, that starts in the recent past and then works backward. This weaving of disparate timelines could be a neat device, but given that the Anna and Julie chapters alternate, the overall effect is muddled rather than dramatic and detracts from the book. (If I'd been Gentry's editor, I would have suggested a much different approach.) The writing is brisk, with occasional forays into the poetic. "The pounding of the falling water is like a blank piece of paper, and the gun is the point of a pencil hovering a millimeter above it, sketching the three of us invisibly on the air before committing us to the page." Gentry particularly excels in describing the mix of anguish, love, anxiety, joy, and fear that accompanies the mother-daughter relationship, at least from the mother's perspective, and that aspect of the book is what I enjoyed the most.

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