



Missing Ellen

Books Reviewed:

[Missing Ellen](#) [1]

Issue:

[203](#) [2]

Reviewer:

[Lucy Staines](#) [3]

~~Editor's Choice:~~

~~New Talent~~

BfK Rating:

4

Maggie and Ellen are best friends and have been since the age of four. It's the opposites attract kind of friendship. Maggie is drawn to Ellen for her confidence, energy and passion for life. In fact, Ellen wins everyone over, even the teachers are willing to indulge her when she plays April Fools pranks on them. We know that Ellen loves and needs Maggie, calm, quiet, thoughtful, for the stability she gives her.

The book opens with Ellen missing. The school year has started and for first time ever, she's not there with Maggie. As the story unfolds, we slowly discover the reason for her absence, and what it's done to her best friend. There are two narrative voices, both of them Maggie's: one is in the letters she writes to her friend, the other describes for the reader the string of events that led to Ellen's disappearance. Her descriptions of those events are honest and detailed, while her letters are full of grief, apology and longing. Ellen has a wild recklessness that attracts people, but there's something frightening about it too. The breakdown of her parents' marriage pushes her over the edge, Maggie watching helplessly as her friend's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and dangerous. We come to understand that Ellen won't ever be coming back, and finally find out why.

Natasha Mac a Bháird portrays both girls very well indeed, quiet Maggie particularly so. We feel her sense of loss, understand the betrayal and bitterness she feels, and her need to forgive both Ellen and herself.

The book is as much an examination of mental breakdown as a study of friendship. What happens to Ellen is shocking, the impact on those who loved her equally so. In one revealing episode, we realise how scared her classmates are of Maggie, caught up in grief and guilt.

This is a thoughtful, affecting and very well written novel. For boy's eye view of a similar scenario see Simon Packham's equally intelligent and moving [Silenced](#) [4].

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Links:

[1] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/missing-ellen>

[2] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/203>

[3] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/lucy-staines>

[4] <http://w2w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/196/childrens-books/reviews/silenced>