

LITTLE GIRL GONE by Alexandra Burt

Published by Avon

Having read and reviewed a similarly themed novel last year, I was expecting ‘*Little Girl Gone*’ to be just a variation of the previous story. However, my expectations were confounded, as this is a cleverly crafted and original thriller, highlighting the issue of postnatal depression – a debilitating condition, which has the potential to inhibit the bonding process between mother and child.

THE PLOT

Estelle Paradise is finding motherhood tough. With her husband Jack away on business most of the time, she is left alone to deal with her fractious baby daughter, Mia – who refuses to be soothed.

Hearing the baby constantly crying, Estelle’s neighbours suspect she is a neglectful mother. Therefore, when Mia disappears from her cot one day, everybody – including her husband – fears Estelle may have harmed her. This suspicion is further compounded by the fact Estelle failed to report Mia’s disappearance until several days later.

Convinced Estelle knows what happened to Mia, Jack’s patience finally runs out when she is found miles from home in a wrecked car, with a wound to the head and no memory of recent events. Arranging for her to be admitted to a psychiatric facility, he then leaves her in the capable hands of Dr Ari, hoping he will help his wife remember what she did to Mia.

As Estelle’s memory gradually begins to return, she realises the answer to Mia’s disappearance lies with her. What she does not know, however, is whether she is responsible for it ... but she is determined to find out.

MY REVIEW

‘*Little Girl Gone*’ takes the subject of child abduction, mixes it with a large dose of postnatal depression and turns it into an extremely clever thriller – one that keeps you guessing right until the end.

As a prologue, the reader is presented with a newspaper cutting, stating that baby Mia Connor is missing. It then makes an appeal on behalf of her parents – Jack Connor and his wife Estelle Paradise – for anyone with information about her whereabouts to come forward to the NYPD. This clever literary device provides the foundation for an intriguing mystery.

The story opens when Estelle wakes up in hospital following a car crash. Not only was she found miles from her home but she also had a head wound, resulting in the loss of an ear. She has now been diagnosed with amnesia after emerging from a medically induced coma.

From the moment Estelle realises that Mia is missing, and that she is the main suspect in her disappearance, the story focuses on the resolution of the mystery. Accused by her husband and vilified by the press, Estelle starts to wonder if she might actually be responsible. Desperate to regain her memory and discover the truth, Estelle begins to work with her psychiatrist, Dr Ari, to slowly piece together the events that led up to the crash.

As each piece of the puzzle is gradually revealed, the reader gets to know Estelle and her struggle with postnatal depression. It also becomes apparent that her husband, Jack, is neither a supportive nor indeed an understanding partner, leaving Estelle alone with a fractious child for lengthy periods of time after accepting a job in another state. Knowing she is struggling, it therefore adds insult to injury when Jack also believes she is guilty of harming Mia.

As the story unfolds, our empathy with Estelle grows as we become ever more aware of the extent of her mental torment. She feels increasingly alone and inadequate, riven with guilt at her inability to bond with and console her child. The child herself clearly senses the tension and reacts accordingly, setting up a vicious circle of emotional turmoil.

When Estelle's memory begins to return, the story opens out to reveal a sinister web of criminal activity. Events then start to fall into place as Estelle – driven by a mother's love – desperately tries to find her missing child and vindicate herself. The final revelation will tear at your heartstrings.

This is a highly recommended read.

THE AUTHOR

Alexandra Burt was born in Germany. After her college graduation she moved to Texas and, while pursuing literary translations, she decided to tell her own stories. After three years of writing classes her short fiction appeared in the *Freedom Fiction Journal*, *All Things Girl*, *MUSED Literary Review*, and *Heater Crime Fiction Magazine*.

She is a member of Sisters In Crime, an organization promoting the advancement, recognition and professional development of women crime writers.

She lives in Texas with her husband, her daughter, and two Labradors.

'Little Girl Gone is published by Avon and is available in eBook and paperback format. It can be purchased from Amazon, Waterstones, W H Smith, Foyles and other leading bookshops.