



The Viewing Room (Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction Ser.)

Jacquelin Gorman

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In *The Viewing Room*, two hospital chaplains console the living during the moments when they look upon their beloved dead for one last time in a large urban hospital in Los Angeles. But this room is also a character, linking stories together and bearing witness in chilling testimony of grief and wisdom. Henrietta and Maurice, the chaplains, are ministers who have lost their faith due to devastating personal tragedy. Still, they regain their hold on their own lives through their work, one death at a time.

Jacquelin Gorman lays bare nine parallel worlds of suffering in stories of unflinching detail, vividly told with heart, guts, and compassion. In these pages, the children are both murderers and victims, and the adults fare no better: a teenage father shakes his screaming baby to death; high school surfers kill the homeless for sport as a way of cleaning up their beaches; a Muslim basketball player readies her best friend for burial with a sacred ritual that reveals forbidden love; a scorned ex-wife leaves a message in permanent ink on the body of her betrayer; and a pet therapy dog's unconditional love for a decaying body memorializes the spirit within.

This moving and unsettling collection of stories shines a piercing light on the dark corners of our modern world, illuminating necessary truths that convey a clearer and, undoubtedly, greater vision of humanity.

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