



Stony River

Tricia Dower

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"It's rare to find such a polished debut and Dower is a masterful storyteller to watch." -- the Globe and Mail.

"Think Mad Men but even madder." -- the Toronto Star

Stony River, New Jersey, 1955: On a sweltering June afternoon, Linda Wise and Tereza Dobra witness a disturbing scene. A pale, pretty girl who looks about their age is taken from Crazy Haggerty's house by two uniformed policemen. Everyone in Stony River thought Crazy Haggerty lived alone. The pale, pretty girl is about to enter an alien world, and as Tereza and Linda try to make sense of what they've seen, they're unaware their own lives will soon be shattered as well. Set in a decade we tend to think of as a more innocent time, *Stony River* shows in dramatic and unexpected ways how perilous it was to come of age in the 1950s with its absent mothers, controlling fathers, biblical injunctions, teenaged longing, and small-town pretence. The threat of sexual violence is all around: angry fathers at home, dirty boys in the neighbourhood, strange men in strange cars, a dead girl, and another gone missing.

An engrossing novel about growing up, finding your voice, and forgiving your family, *Stony River* is a brilliant story from a remarkable new Canadian voice.

Stony River Details

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Author : Tricia Dower

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From Reader Review Stony River for online ebook

Brian says

There is much to recommend in Tricia Dower's *Stony River*, starting with the writing. Her prose is both readable and well paced; the detail regarding her setting (the Fifties) and character backgrounds (especially Irish Wicca) is both interesting and educational, and she integrates this "background music" into her story with great skill. It is the story, as usual however, that intrigues me the most. Three young unlikely female heroes manage, with the help of older wiser female characters, to overcome male demons (overprotective parents, child abusers, psychopaths, and religious zealots) and achieve self-understanding and fulfillment. It's a good storyline, more comedy than romance, in terms of structure. It definitely has the God-bless-us-everyone ending expected in comedy; the elements of daring-do from romance kept me turning pages. As much as the 1950s were, for me, an idle of tranquility, they were also a time when women were not allowed to run more than 800m for fear they would damage themselves, Joe McCarthy's maniacal jingoism terrorized the media, and African Americans were required to use separate drinking fountains. Revisiting my youth without those greater evils was a comfort, but it was also a cold comfort: three well-woven tales of success in a tapestry which time has shown was marred with oppression and failure. Did I expect more? Not necessarily. Since the male obstacles portrayed--while they seem small in comparison to the institutional villains of the time--are still problems today, perhaps the message is: we haven't progressed as far as we might have hoped in the past sixty years--more ironic than comic to me.

Suzanne says

A coming-of-age tale that's heavy with tough issues, from domestic abuse to mental illness to incest. Tricia Dower does an excellent job of revealing the darker side of 1950s small-town American life. Full review to come in Quill & Quire.

Eva says

"Stony River" will grab your attention and keep you engaged from the beginning. Tricia Dower does an excellent job setting the scene of the community where the protagonist lives.

After she hears about her father's death, the young girl who is also the mother of a young boy, does not have the maturity to deal with the situation. Luckily, a local policeman and his wife step up and offer shelter in their home for Miranda and her son.

Some aspects of the book may be distributing to readers, but they are necessary to really get into the headspace of both James and Miranda.

Thank you GoodReads for the book.

Sue says

This is the coming of age story of three girls, Linda, Tereza, and Miranda. Linda is sheltered and almost smothered by the love of her parents. Tereza runs wild attempting to escape the cruelty of her life with an uncaring mother and abusive stepfather. Miranda is imprisoned by her father's delusions and absolute control of every aspect of her life.

I simply don't have the right words to describe this book but it is one of the best I've ever read. Perfect depiction of life in a small town during that period in history.

Andrea P. says

This review and others can be found on [Cozy Up With A Good Read](#)

This book tells the tale of how one afternoon in 1955 affected the lives of many people in the small town of Stony River, at the heart of the tale is three girls, Tereza, Linda and Miranda but readers have many other voices as well throughout. This book is a coming of age story of three girls who are all growing up in different families and readers get to see how their lives change over time because of the people that they are surrounded by.

I really enjoyed the setting of this story, taking place in a small town where everyone knows everyone else. It's the type of place where you are supposed to always feel safe, but this book shows that even these small towns have their secrets. Tricia Dower also does such a great job of taking readers back to the time of the 50's, there are many mentions of the TV shows that were on and the music people listened to, even descriptions of the cars that were driven in that period.

These three characters all have very different lives, and each of them takes their circumstances and changes their lives in one way or another. The most interesting girl for me in this book was Miranda, and how she grows up with so many things stacked against her. Watching as Miranda learns new things about herself and the different things she can do was amazing, and I loved how she became independent and trust worthy even though people in the town disliked where she came from.

Tereza has a completely different lifestyle from the other two girls and she learns to take matters into her own hands and makes a life for herself. Tereza is one who hates asking for help, but eventually she lets someone help her get her life back on track and it affects the rest of her life in a large way. I felt bad for Tereza seeing what she went through and then to see her grow up so fast when she shouldn't have to is heart breaking.

Linda's character was the one that I didn't care for as much as the others in the story. Linda grows up as a very guarded child and she is naive about many things in the real world. Her parents are protective to the point that Linda is sheltered and doesn't understand a lot of things. But she grows and learns how to speak up for herself.

I had a few difficulties with the many changing perspectives in the beginning, but it made sense as to why there are so many voices. Not only do we see how one small event changed the lives of the girls who experienced it for themselves but how these three girls change the lives of others along the way.

Honestly, this book is a beautiful portrayal of growing up in the 1950's and the secrets that everyone has. This is a great book about growing up and how different lifestyles can really affect the rest of your life.

Tricia Dower has such a unique voice in her writing and she keeps her readers interested in the story.

Lorrie Crossley says

I really liked this book. It made me think. Most of us view the 1950s as a time of innocence when every home had a mother and father, where mother stayed at home to look after the children, where nobody locked their doors and everyone abided by good Christian values. But Tricia Dower strips away the veneer of our "Leave It To Beaver" image of the 50s and takes us behind closed doors to experience a more realistic look at life in small town U.S.A. during this time. Her characters are so real and descriptions so vivid and accurate, that within a few chapters you are completely sucked into the lives of Linda, Teresa and Miranda as they struggle to come of age and deal with incest, mental and physical abuse, sexism and so much more. I encourage everyone to read this beautifully written and well-researched book. Congratulations Tricia Dower. I look forward to reading your next novel.

ashley lloyd spanton says

It's sometimes hard to remember that this book takes place in the '50s. A lot of the time, those years are portrayed as innocent and pure with a focus on the perfect family, but Dower reaches behind the happy surface and examines the darkness that can creep into any era.

Stony River is an intertwining tale of three very different girls, all who happen to be in the same place at the same time on one otherwise ordinary afternoon. The events of that day, though seemingly small, will forever change their lives.

The themes expressed in the book are anything but light. Religion, abuse, violence, mental illness; it's all there. But woven in between these dark webs are rich characters and a stormy coming of age story that you float right along with.

Lissette says

A resident of Stony River for as long as she can remember, Linda Wise knows there's nothing to fear. Stony River has always been a calm place where everyone knows each others names and everything they've done throughout their lives. Life in town is nothing but ordinary, however. Until Crazy Haggerty's secrets start coming to light. It's then life starts to change for all of Stony River's residents.

A coming-of-age story, Stony River immerses the reader in a diverse tale surrounding several of the town's inhabitants. We meet Linda, headstrong, yet reserved. There's also Tereza, who's outspoken and quite inquisitive. Miranda Haggerty is the most curious of these three girls. Her sheltered life has kept her from learning about the world around her. You can imagine her surprise and curiosity when her life is upended from one day to the next.

Tricia has written such a bittersweet, yet intriguing story that allows the reader to feel what her characters feel. It's easy to envision the world she's created around this unassuming town and the people who inhabit it. She's painted such a clear picture of it that the reader feels like he/she is a part of the story itself.

The further you get into the book, the more the world Tricia has created opens up. I enjoyed seeing Miranda, Tereza, and Linda grow up along the way. These complex characters mesh in such a way that you end up seeing them become more than what they were at the beginning of the story. Their lives might seem quiet, at first, but the chaos that surrounds them becomes apparent with every turn of the page. You can honestly tell how much research and thought has gone into this book. Lovingly crafted, this is a story that will remain with you long after you've read it.

Vikki VanSickle says

This has a lot of the hallmarks I look for in a book: teenage protagonists, small town drama, 1950s small town setting, and a literary voice. Dower's book has a very ominous feeling to it, and the three main characters, despite drastic differences in their experiences, are all dealing with less than supportive and ideal living situations. Miranda has been raised completely in isolation by her father until his sudden death, which leaves her defenseless with a son at age fifteen. Tereza runs away from her abusive family situation only to end up married at fifteen to a very unstable and unhappy young man. Linda finds herself caught in the middle of her two very unhappy parents, who send her very mixed messages about life and love, that is when they bother to take an interest in her as a person at all.

All three girls hit their own rock bottom before they are able to set themselves on the road to recovery. Despite many tense scenes, hopeless and infuriating situations, the book ends on a note of hope that manages to feel realistic, quite a feat given the dire circumstances the girls find themselves in. Dower does a wonderful job creating a bleak but not hopeless portrait of how difficult life was for women in the 1950s. There is very little relief and some people may find the book ceaselessly dark, but it is well written and gripping account of the secret lives of others.

Paula says

Stony River is a beautifully written coming of age story set in the 50's. Tricia Dower does a brilliant job of portraying the mood and culture of that time period. Linda, Tereza, and Miranda are all fascinating characters and I became invested in each one of them. But more importantly, I really like Tricia Dower's writing style. She reminds me of Margaret Laurence and early Margaret Atwood, two of my favourite authors. I will definitely be reading more of this author.

4.5 stars because I thought that the ending wrapped up a little too neatly.

MzBrooklynJayReviews says

A startlingly realistic story, *Stony River* follows three adolescent girls – Linda Wise, Tereza Dobra, and Miranda Haggerty – on their perilous journey towards womanhood while living in New Jersey in the 1950s. Each of these girls face different struggles: Abuse, Parental indifference, Molestation, Religious Zealotry, and Prejudice. This is a tale of women oppressed, repressed in their sexuality, caged by society's views on what is proper; some endure many types of abuse sexual, verbal, and even mental. Growing up female in a society that treats women as lesser beings. Forced to hold your tongue taught by your own father to always oblige a man's ego. A time where religious beliefs often bordered on zealotry. A society where people turn a blind eye to wrongdoing simply because it's not their business.

Tereza and Linda are friends it seems the only friend to one another. Seemingly because they are both outcast although in different ways. While Linda comes from what seems to be a middle class family she has serious self-esteem issues. Tereza is a misunderstood and abused child. Truly these girls have nothing in common at all except a need to escape the constraints placed upon them by their families. In fact, their friendship is short lived, the discovery of Miranda Haggerty is the catalyst to the end of Linda and Tereza's friendship.

Quote:

"Tereza was the only girl even close to her age on the "right" side of the highway Linda wasn't allowed to cross alone. Tereza moving in was like finding an extra gift under the Christmas tree."

Linda Wise is eleven years old, her family isn't rich but well enough off not to be considered poor; her mother is a stay-at-home wife and her father works at the town chemical plant. Linda is a sweet innocent wholesome god fearing young woman innocent of "worldly things". Linda is full figured and has low self-esteem.

Quote:

"She flushed with pleasure. Occasionally, when he called on her in class, she sensed he saw through her hideous plaid eyeglass frames to someone he could love if she were older and thinner. "

She grows up repressed and kind of flails her way through her adolescence through trial and error due in part to her lack of friends and real world knowledge, but also attributed to her parents indifferent and self-absorbed ways their inability to accept their daughter for who she is and their failure to guide her properly to being the woman she should become.

Quote:

"Linda remembered her own disappointing twelfth birthday. When the Stage Manager said the dead didn't stay interested in the living for long, she'd thought of Mother, shut up in her room across the hall, showing little interest in anyone or anything. It made her feel hopeless and angry."

The world that Linda Wise lives in is one where she doesn't even feel like she can come to her parents after the terrifying event of being sexually assaulted after taking a ride from a stranger. She won't even go to the police for fear of getting in trouble with her parents. And given the way her father reacted when the elderly store owner forced her to kiss him it's really not surprising.

Quote:

"Did you say anything to encourage him?" Mother asked. "No." Should she have said she didn't like him? "Did he hurt you?" Daddy asked. "Not really." His hands had dug into her shoulders. "Well, then," Daddy said, "try to understand how lonely he's been since his wife died."

Linda's own father, the image of what to look for in a man fails to guide her as a father should

Quote:

"He saw himself whisper into Linda's ear and the two of them make their way to an alcove near the entrance. He saw himself grip her shoulders with his big, square hands. Heard himself trot out his authoritative business voice. Linda's expression froze as he bit out the words "Don't ever turn down a dance, do you hear me?" Ignoring her attempt at an explanation he pressed on, explaining the fragility of the male ego, the

courage it took to ask a girl to dance and how humiliating it was to be turned down, especially in front of others. She was to follow along with whatever steps the boy made, laugh if he laughed, reassure him if he apologized for stumbling, treat the dance as though it were the most fun she'd ever had and the boy the most interesting person she'd ever met. Roger couldn't make himself stop even after Linda's eyes got shimmery with tears and her body rigid as marble."

Linda's mother's own feelings of repression caused by her husband's selfishness, and disregard for her feelings. And her unhappiness with the choices she's made as well as her depression caused by a miscarriage have had a direct effect on how she handles her daughter.

Quote:

"whatever Bill's job demanded came first. She'd learned the practical wisdom of that perspective from her army Wife-with-a-capital-W mother."

"If Robert had lived, Roger would have doted on him and not stolen Linda away from her. Mom had told her countless times to put the boy behind her and love the child God gave her, but three people wasn't much of a family, not like the eight kids her own parents had. The plain truth was that Roger and Linda didn't need her."

"Roger would never move away from the house he was born in. Betty accepted that. Those first few years she didn't mind sharing a home with Mother Wise, as she insisted Betty call her. She didn't mind taking care of her when she was dying, even though the woman called Betty a hick. After she died, Betty wanted Roger to give some thought to living near her mom for a while. But he said, "You're the one who came out here and decided to stay." True enough. She just wished he'd try to make it more worth her while."

Tereza Dobra is a completely different case she knows more of the world than any child at age 13 should. She's a street child running rampant, unsupervised and not cared for the way she should be searching for a way out of the life she's living the daily abuse at the hands of her step father and a mother who fails to protect her. The circumstances of her life cause her to have far more "Worldly experience than any child should. And Tereza makes it to adulthood by pure luck finding a knight to her damsel and he surely saves her from her own stupidity. As much as Tereza had reason to escape her life she doesn't know as much about the real world as she thinks she does, and finds out quickly that a young girl cannot survive on her own.

Quote:

"Talking dirty was their way of showing they liked her. She only ever let them stick their tongues in her mouth and flash their dicks at her. Guys were so impressed with their dicks."

"Jimmy hardly ever smacked Ma and Allen. He never hit their jaws so hard they practically amputated their tongues with their teeth. That time, he'd been scared shitless the hospital would call the cops. He bought her a Dale Evans lamp and didn't raise a hand to her for months. That was when she was eleven and keener on Dale Evans."

"the realization that Ma had been forsaking her for Jimmy since she was four years old smacked her clear across the face."

Kept in seclusion since the age of three Miranda Haggerty is well learned, incredibly intelligent and a quick learner however the circumstances of her life in seclusion have left its mark on her personality. Raised by her father a Celtic Zealot, Miranda lacks the social skills of the average girl her age. Miranda quickly finds that the things she's been taught about the world are just not what she thought. As well as having to face the truth of her son Cian's conception and the realization that the person she loved trusted abused her trust and stole

her childhood.

Quote:

“FOR TWELVE YEARS Miranda has viewed the World through the attic’s streaky half-moon window, seeing half a tree, half a street and only the birds and clouds that passed by her scrap of sky. “

“She’s the best reader and speller in Sister Celine’s fifth-grade class and excels at religious studies; she’d be in a higher grade if she knew more about such things as the Pilgrims and the Gold Rush.”

Miranda begins to adapt to the world around her. Miranda and her son Cian become wards of a Catholic Orphanage run by Nuns now thrust into a world of Catholic dogma bordering on religious zealotry.

Quote:

“Once a week Mother Alfreda tries to guide Miranda into a trance state. Last week she had her gaze at a crucifix because, hundreds of years ago, Christ had visited mystic-turned-saint Margaret Mary with his hands and feet bloodied as if he’d just fallen off the cross.”

Miranda adapts by combining the similarities between the Celtic religion she’s been raised with and the Catholic religion she now has no choice but to treat as law.

Quote:

“Mother Alfreda has instructed her to stare at the globe in hopes she’ll go into a trance long enough to entertain another holy visitor or to glimpse, as Mechthild of Magdeburg did, the “Eternal Hatred” of Hell.”

“You must conserve your mystical energy for divine visitations.”

Dower makes a pointed comparison between the orphanage and prison.

Quote:

“Mother Alfreda lays out orders: lest Miranda show a continued proclivity for losing a pulse, she will move to the infirmary where Sister Nurse can watch over her; she’ll be excused from the classroom so that she won’t be tainted by other inmates’ cynicism and worldliness”

It’s clear right away that the Nuns word and that of the catholic church is law there the children are treated no better than inmates they have no rights and are guilty. Surely some sin committed by them or their parents have landed them in the care of the orphanage. Miranda’s resilient though and adjust to her new life and the new rules presented before her, she becomes adept at maneuvering through a world she’s never known, and learns to bend things in her favor.

Stony River is inspired by the author’s memories of what she describes as a repressive time as well as some true crime events that occurred in her home state of New Jersey. Although Dowers main focus seems to be the treatment of females during this time in our history, she also touches on lives built based on society’s expectations, and a culture of and double standards rather than happiness, sexual repression and prejudices that plagued society during that time.

Quote:

“Stony River sits on the peninsula of I’m Better Than You, she wrote. White vs. colored. Christian vs. Jew.

Catholic vs. Protestant. The married sit in judgment of the divorced. People who live on one side of the highway think they're better than us on the other and those in the big houses near the high school think they're best of all. Patients in private hospital rooms feel superior to those in wards. Some fathers think their jobs are more important than others. Teenagers are no better. Jocks think they're cooler than hoods and nobody wants to be a freshman."

"She returned to her desk and wrote: *Stony River* is the ground asleep under snow, its secrets imperceptible from behind a thick pane of glass."

Tricia Dower has done well here the work of fiction in my opinion sheds a serious spot light on the failures of society in 1950's America, and allows us to appreciate how society has grown even if there is still a long way further to go.

Faith Flaherty says

Stony River by Tricia Dower is a worthwhile read. It is promoted as a book for young adults, but I enjoyed it so much that I'm promoting it as a "coming of age" story for everyone.

This is a story about three girls in a small town, during the 1950's. One of the girls is dramatically different. She was raised by an emotionally ill father, who fathers her child. When her father dies, protective services places her in an orphanage. Fortunately, a young mother watches over her eventually adopts her and mentors her fragile emotions.

The removal of this young teenager and her infant son from her crazy home was witnessed by the other two girls. They happened to be just playing around the house. But now, each one of their lives takes off in different directions.

Tereza comes from a dysfunctional family. Her father beats her and her mother is too insecure to help her. She runs away and finds herself married by fifteen and widowed—left with a baby and a dependent mother-in-law. I don't know why, but Tereza is my favorite character. I was always rooting for her, but she lives a hard life and there's no sun on the horizon. She wanted to be an actress but can't read; she has dyslexia. I hope, Tricia Dower continues Tereza's story in another book.

Linda is the good girl. Her family is loving, maybe a little too controlling, but loving parents cover a lot of sins. Unfortunately, the parents have difficulties and Linda tempts fate. She starts flirting with the wild boys and accepting rides from strange men. She's lucky because girls start getting raped and murdered.

Miranda is the young girl who was placed in the orphanage. It turns out she's an empath. An empath is someone who feels the energy from people and objects. Perhaps her strange childhood with her father's Irish paganism, mixed with the orphanage's religious sisters' mystical spirituality nurtured her empathetic gifts. Miranda was adopted by Doris—the young mother. And Doris is her bulwark—her mother, sister, and best friend. Miranda eventually uses her empathetic gifts to solve the murders.

These are the three protagonists. I hope their stories continue in a series. I liked them that much. *Stony River*, like most good novels, is primarily about the characters. Tricia Dower makes the reader care about all three girls, and the innocent baby, Cian. That's why I want more.

The setting is a close-knit community in the 1950's. Everyone thinks they know everyone and everyone's business or think they do. That's why rape and murder shook their world in such a horrific manner. Tricia Dower knows how to convey emotionally charged situations. If you don't feel Miranda's panic when her baby was taken, then you're not human. Also, the fear and tension when Linda accepts a ride from a stranger is palpable. Tricia Dower is an excellent writer.

Stony River is an intense story. The characters are believable and interesting. I recommend the book highly. Although I was given the book to review, I was not required to write a favorable review. This review is my own honest assessment.

Jane says

Growing up we all had a spooky house in the neighbourhood or an odd person that the kids would invent stories about. In this novel about coming of age in the 1950s in small-town New Jersey, Tricia Dower does just that with Crazy Haggerty and his creepy house. As the book began, I felt myself 12 again and tagging along with Linda and her new friend from the wrong side of the tracks, Tereza; watching with them as police officers escorted young Miranda and her son from the home. This is fabulous summer reading about hidden secrets, loss of innocence and even violence and murder in the 1950s era. Nothing is what it seems in Stony River and Dower's novel keeps you turning pages until the end. I received this book free from Penguin Canada as part of their exclusive reads program.

Tricia Dower says

Stony River is finally about to come out in the US -- hooray!

Katherine Pederson says

Lots of interesting and sad characters that are well drawn. I found it a bit confusing near the beginning, but when I finally "got" Miranda's "gift" it was much easier to read.
