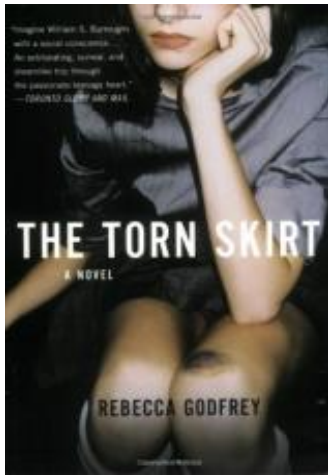


# The Torn Skirt

by Rebecca Godfrey

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## About the Book

Two weeks can change a person's life forever, especially in the case of 16-year-old Sara. Born with a mysterious fever, Sara's life has never matched her picturesque hometown of Victoria, BC's postcard-perfect reputation.

Deserted long ago by her rebellious heiress mother, Sara has somehow managed to piece together a life with her sensitive, pot-smoking father. Unable to cope with his teenage daughter's coming of age, Seamus drives off into the woods, abandoning Sara to fend for herself. Desperate for guidance, for a role model, for a little bit of excitement, Sara has a fleeting encounter with a mysterious girl -- Justine, a teenage runaway in the torn skirt -- who holds for Sara the promise of beauty, connection, danger. Her search for Justine -- which is, in essence, her search for herself -- takes her into the dark, but tempting underbelly of violence, drugs, prostitution, and even murder. **The Torn Skirt** leaves you hoping and aching for a sign that this unusually perceptive young woman will emerge unscathed, all the way to the final page.

The precision, clarity, lyricism (and wit) of Rebecca Godfrey's prose have created, in Sara, a piercing and unforgettable heroine -- and gives voice to the profound and universal experience of teenage isolation.

## Discussion Guide

1. Sara's fever suddenly appears after lying dormant for 10 years. What factors seem to trigger the onset of her fever? What does the fever represent? Did you feel the fever was psychosomatic or real? Is her fever a "symptom" or a "disease"?

2. Sixteen is a particularly soul-searching age for teenage girls, and Sara's search for Justine is, in essence, a search for herself. Why does Sara find Justine so fascinating as opposed to the other "Farah Fawcett-haired" island girls in her high school?

3. The girls Sara befriends and finds the most intriguing are all similar in that they are also desperate to leave their little isolated island. Alice (aka: China, Tahiti, and Bali), the teenage prostitute with an aptitude for drawing maps from memory, longs to escape to Penticton. Justine's dream is to travel to Greece to find her father. And Ivy Mercer, whom Sara wishes had been her friend, is off to college in New England. What are all the girls running from, and what are they really hoping to find in their travels?

4. In the end, Sara turns into Justine and in many ways emulates her -- a teenage runaway wanted by the law, all the way down to the final image of Sara running down the road in her torn skirt. Did you feel this is the life Sara really hoped to find? Did the ending suggest to you that Justine may have been just as innocent as Sara at one time, before becoming hardened by life on the streets?

5. When Sara discovers that Heather had been gang raped by the stoner boys, Sara feels somehow responsible. When Heather is then institutionalized, Sara shows up at the Ledger Hotel to visit her, as if they were close friends. What prompts Sara's sudden obsession with Heather's misfortunes?

6. The color red plays a significant role in the book: Sara's red hair; the forbidden Red Zone; and The Red Room at White Oak. Red usually represents "stop" or "danger." What does it symbolize in **The Torn Skirt**?

7. When Sara decides she will become a nurse, she sets out to teach herself everything there is to know about nursing, and even dresses in a nurse's uniform. The more Sara is drawn deeper into trouble, the more delusional she becomes about being a nurse. Is Sara really looking to heal others, or is she looking to heal herself? Or is she clinging so tenaciously to becoming a nurse because it's her last hope for living a normal life?

8. Sara was abandoned by her mother? and then her father. Justine lost her father, and her mother is never mentioned. China wonders if her mother is still alive. "Teenage runaway" seems like a misnomer once you realize that the girls didn't choose to become separated from their families. How do China, Justine, Sara, and the other street girls forge their own family?

9. Sara states her personal dislike for drug use early on in the book. However, after one day in the Forbidden Zone, she's suddenly doing drugs. Is Sara's reckless drug abuse similar to the self-mutilation act of Cassie and Amber carving FTW into their own flesh with a razor blade?

10. Seamus feels too much and Sara, the "Ice Queen," seems to feel too little. Does Sara intentionally set out to protect herself from the feelings that destroyed her father? How successful is she in suppressing her emotions?

11. Love's Baby Soft is such a young girl's perfume. Heavy metal music is also typically associated with younger audiences. In what other ways does the author depict the immaturity of the characters, using images often in conflict with their mature situations?

## Author Bio

Rebecca Godfrey (1967-2022) was an award-winning novelist and journalist. Her books include *THE TORN SKIRT*, finalist for the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, and the award-winning true crime story *UNDER THE BRIDGE*, a Disney+ limited series starring Riley Keough as Rebecca Godfrey. Godfrey earned her MFA from Sarah Lawrence College and taught writing at Columbia University. Born and raised in Canada, she lived with her husband and daughter in Upstate New York.

## Critical Praise

"A completely convincing portrait of adolescence?an impressive feat."

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### **The Torn Skirt**

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