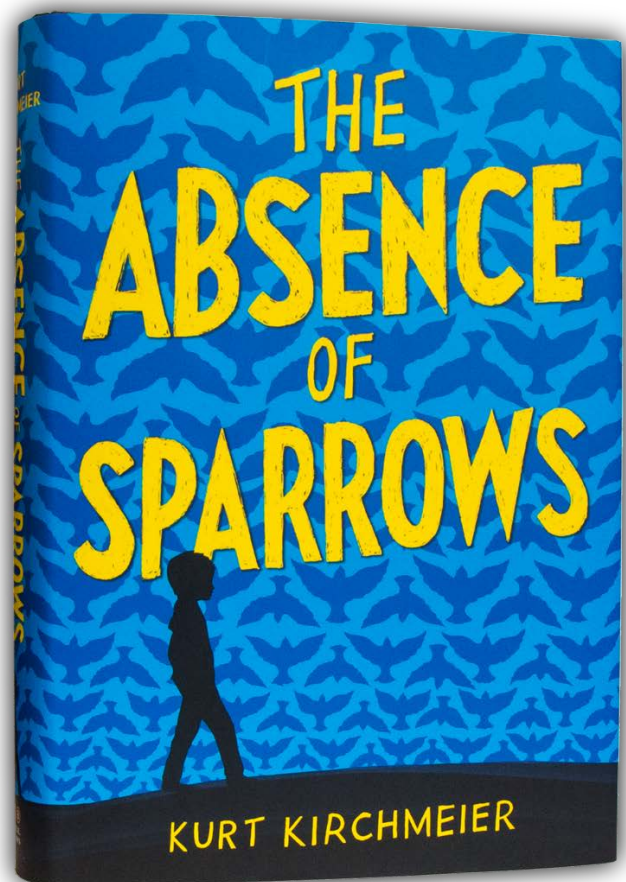


PRESS KIT



“The most frightening young YA fantasy since Kenneth Oppel’s *The Nest*. Sure to be popular with readers seeking a truly scary story.

—School Library Journal





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kurt Kirchmeier is a Saskatchewan-based writer who has always been drawn to books with heart and a strong sense of mystery and wonder. He has a soft spot for speculative fiction and dark coming-of-age stories. When he isn't reading or writing, he enjoys spending time outdoors and connecting with nature. He's an avid photographer, and has a particular fondness for birds.

When he isn't writing stories, taking photos, or connecting with nature, Kurt enjoys reading and listening to podcasts. He also fancies a good cup of tea and shoots a mean game of pool. The smartest thing he's ever done is marry his high school sweetheart.

Kurt's photos have appeared in Photonews Magazine, Living Bird, All About Backyard Birds, and elsewhere, and his short stories and poems have appeared in Abyss & Apex, Murky Depths, Weird Tales, Shimmer, Space and Time, Tesseract 15, and elsewhere. The Absence of Sparrows is his debut novel.

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- Instagram: kurtkirchmeier
- Flickr / Nature Photography: Kirchmeier
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- For film and television rights, Kurt is represented by Mary Pender-Coplan at United Talent Agency. Please contact Mary at penderm@unitedtalent.com
- For review copies or press opportunities with Kurt, please contact Siena Koncsol, publicity manager for Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, at Siena.Koncsol@hbgusa.com



THE ABSENCE OF SPARROWS

- Author: Kurt Kirchmeier
(pronounced "Kirsh-Meyer")
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EDITORIAL REVIEWS

"Stephen King-level horror haunting a tight, thoughtful domestic drama."

—BCCB

"The most frightening young YA fantasy since Kenneth Oppel's The Nest. Sure to be popular with readers seeking a truly scary story."

—School Library Journal

"Will stick with the reader long after they are finished."

—School Library Connection

"...an eerie slow burn that will leave readers distraught but satisfied."

—Booklist



SUMMARY

In the small town of Griever's Mill and across the world, strange dark clouds begin to roll in, transforming not only the sky, but also those on the ground beneath it. For young Ben Cameron, this isn't just a premature end to what he had hoped would be a summer of bird watching; it might well spell the end of his childhood.

First, he sees old man Crandall turn to glass in the street, and then his dad becomes solid obsidian at the dining room table. Now Ben fears he'll lose his mom to a total breakdown if the Glass Plague doesn't take her first. To make matters worse, his brother is being brainwashed by a voice on the radio who not only claims to have answers about the plague, but also a plan to stop it. The only problem is, the plan requires a sacrifice Ben isn't sure he can make—especially now that he's come up with a theory involving sparrows and crows and his father's potential return.

And so with the clock counting down to a global deadline for 'the shattering,' and the soul-stealing, hell-on-earth darkness of the plague threatening to become absolute, Ben and his brother will each pick a side—with both their father and humanities' fates hanging in the balance.

BOOK EXCERPTS

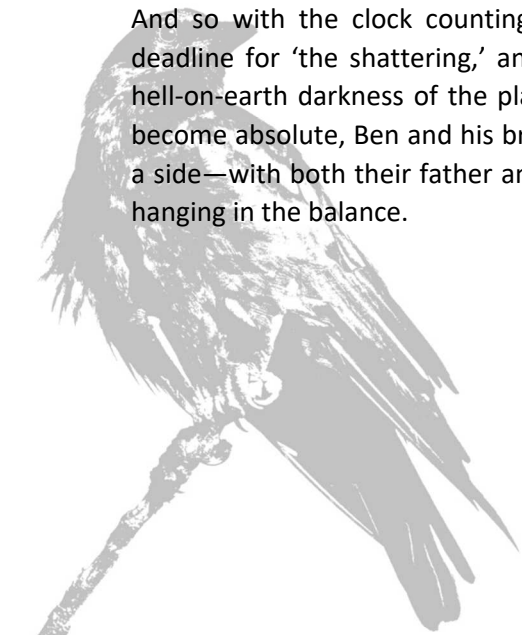
"It's spreading," I heard Pete say. And it was. From his hand to his wrist and then right up his sleeve—by the time my brain even registered what was happening, the blackness had claimed his whole arm and part of his neck above his collar, and it didn't stop there.

Mr. Crandall opened his mouth as if to cry out, but it was already too late; the darkness had seized his vocal cords. A moment later the transformation was complete.

George Crandall stood frozen in place, an obsidian statue dressed in an old wool suit with patches on the elbows. A crow flew down to land on the statue's head. It cawed twice and then silently flew off south.

We always think of birds as being such small and breakable things, all soft feathers and no weight at all, wings of little more substance than toothpicks and parchment paper, and yet when we humans are balled up under blankets in front of the fireplace, they're out there in the harsh world enduring it all, and not only that, but they're singing.

Maybe we're the breakable things, fragile in heart and mind, souls with the tensile strength of a single tissue. Maybe someday when we're all gone and the birds are still around, they'll think to sing a song in our memory, just a few flat notes to mark our passing. Maybe that's all we're worth.



AUTHOR Q & A

1. How did you come to write *The Absence of Sparrows*?

I first got the idea for this story from a dream I had of my own father turning to obsidian. I originally explored the concept in a piece of short fiction, which was published in a magazine in Ireland in 2009. I thought that would be the end of it, but the two brothers from that story stayed with me, their relationship continuing to deepen in my imagination until finally I decided I needed to give them a larger stage. Books like *Boy's Life* by Robert McCammon and *Dandelion Wine* by Ray Bradbury inspired me to make it a coming-of-age story, and my own love of birds inspired me to make the main character a birder as well.

2. You have a soft spot for writing about boys who are open and sensitive. Why is important to you to portray these kinds of characters?

I think sensitive boys often feel trapped inside their own minds. They're made to feel like they can't express themselves openly without risking ridicule. This is often why they turn to books, and why it's important for them to be able to see themselves in the characters they're reading about. It makes them feel less invisible and misunderstood. I also think that the thing we need most in the world right now is empathy, and I believe the only path to empathy is through openness and sensitivity.

3. Early reviewers have commented that *The Absence of Sparrows* isn't only a book for children. Why do you think your middle grade book is finding an audience with adults as well?

My book might incorporate many childhood norms like climbing trees and skipping stones and dressing up as ninjas, but there are heavy and complex themes that arise as a result of the glass plague. In a lot of ways, the story has one foot firmly in childhood and the other one stepping out of it. I think grown-ups will connect with the mature ideas while also experiencing nostalgia for everything else. Similarly, kids will relate to the childhood norms and enjoy the fantastical suspense while also feeling that they can reach deeper if they're ready to.

4. *The Absence of Sparrows* deals with grief and an unstable world. Why do you think books like this are important and meaningful for children today?

I think that the connectedness of modern life and the reality of an endless news cycle with a strong negativity bias exposes kids to a lot of things that previous generations weren't exposed to. Kids are learning at a younger age just how unstable the world really is. I think books that deal with grief and other hard emotions can help readers process and cope with what they are feeling, and if the book also happens to provide some escapist fun or goosebump-inducing thrills, all the better.

5. You were a short-fiction writer who had a number of horror pieces published prior to *The Absence of Sparrows* being acquired. With the recent spate of middle grade horror novel acquisitions, what do you think is important for new readers of the genre to understand as they dive into your book and the genre in general?

I think horror offers a unique experience to young readers, not only because the stories provide them with a safe way to explore their fears, but also because a lot of what makes horror great is left to the imagination of the reader. It offers glimpses behind the curtain and into the darkness, but rarely is everything fully revealed. I think a good thing for a new reader of the genre to keep in mind is that horror operates on our fears of the unknown.

6. School Library Journal called *The Absence of Sparrows* the "most frightening young YA fantasy since Kenneth Oppel's *The Nest*." With the popularity of *Stranger Things*, which your novel was comped to, why do you think today's generation of kids are so comfortable with the horror genre?

I think their access to these sorts of books might be a little less limited than it once was, but honestly, I feel like kids have always been comfortable with the genre. There's a reason they mess around with Ouija boards, brave thrill rides, and play Bloody Mary in the bathroom with their friends. Kids like a good scare now and then, and in a lot of ways, I think they are the best audience of all for scary books, because they haven't lost their sense of wonder when it comes to the strange and unexplained. They're deeply curious about such things.

7. You survived a home invasion on Christmas Eve when you were 10 years old. You've been quoted as saying, "A few short hours later, I was opening presents, toys for a childhood that had abruptly come to its end." How did this childhood experience with trauma influence your writing?

My childhood was full of instability, and that definitely informs my writing, but the thing about a traumatic incident like that is, it destroys your sense of security in the world, and once that's gone, there's no getting it back. It's no coincidence that I now write apocalyptic stories about kids who have lost, or are in the process of losing, their own sense of security, which then forces them to grow up too soon.

8. You're an avid nature photographer with a particular fondness for birds. How does your love of nature influence your writing?

I think that my love for nature effects how the characters I write about see the world. In some ways, it makes them more aware of the connectedness of all things, and provides them with an additional lens through which to contemplate their reality, much like Ben contemplates and contrasts bird behavior with human behavior and draws conclusions from not only the similarities, but also the differences.

PRESS RELEASE

Griever's Mill seemed like a normal place for a boy to grow up. Until the Glass Plague...

For fans of *Stranger Things*, *The Twilight Zone* and Stephen King, comes ***The Absence of Sparrows***, a debut novel by Canadian author Kurt Kirchmeier that explores grief and growing up through the tense and gripping narrative of a world struck by a cataclysmic plague. Perfect for kids ages 9 and up with adult crossover appeal, Kirchmeier's debut will connect with a generation of kids that finds itself living in an uncertain world—and perhaps a generation of adults who look back on their own more idyllic childhoods with a sense of loss and hope for their own children's futures.

In the small town of Griever's Mill, eleven-year-old Ben Cameron is expecting to finish off his summer of relaxing and bird-watching without a hitch. But everything goes wrong when dark clouds roll in.

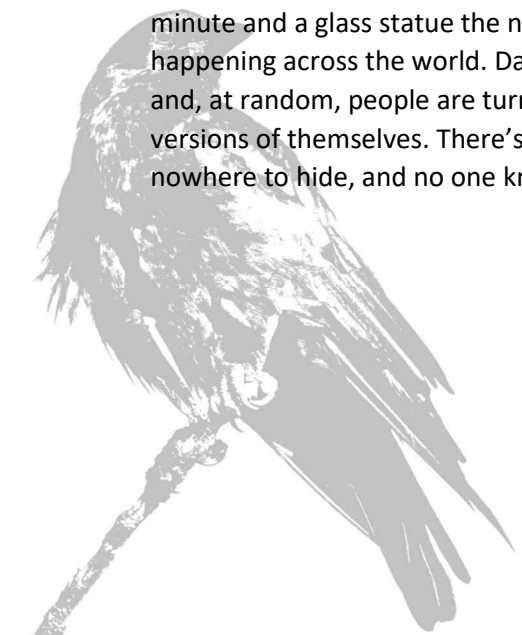
Old Man Crandall is the first to change—human one minute and a glass statue the next. Soon it's happening across the world. Dark clouds fill the sky and, at random, people are turned into frozen versions of themselves. There's nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, and no one knows how to stop it.

Ben's mom is teetering on the edge of a breakdown, and his brother is intent on following the dubious plans put forth by a nameless voice on the radio. In spite of it all, he holds out hope that his town's missing sparrows will return with everyone's souls before the glass plague takes them away...forever.

Using the fantastical to explore the authentic fears and anxieties young people face today, and speaking to real mental health experiences through Ben's mother's illness, ***The Absence of Sparrows*** resonates in its handling of grief and an uncertain world. With regular active shooter drills becoming routine in kid's classrooms and a news cycle that can spike adrenaline levels daily, Kirchmeier provides his readers with a safe, even thrilling, avenue to explore a strange, unfamiliar and scary new world and the loss of innocence that comes with it.

While it's fitting *School Library Journal* called the novel one of the most frightening fantasies to emerge since Kenneth Oppel's *The Nest*, Kirchmeier manages to balance this dark, dangerous world with the beauty Ben finds in nature and his love of birds. Utilizing Ben's ability to use nature as a lens to better see that world, Kirchmeier crafts what is a dark, scary tale, though one with an ultimate—and realistic—message of hope. It's a story sure to stick with readers long after it's read.

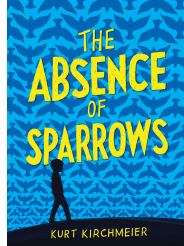
The Absence of Sparrows, from Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, is available at Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Indie Bound, and other major retailers. To learn more or sign up for Kirchmeier's newsletter, visit him at www.kurtkirchmeier.com.



SELL SHEET

JUST THE FACTS

- *The Absence of Sparrows* (May 7, 2019)
- Author: Kurt Kirchmeier
- www.kurtkirchmeier.com
- From Little, Brown Books for Young Readers
- Available from: Barnes & Noble, Amazon, Indie Bound, and other major retailers.
- Available in Hard Cover, eBook & Audio
- Recommended 9 - 12 years +
- Hashtag: #TheAbsenceofSparrows



PULL QUOTES

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Maybe we're the breakable things, fragile in heart and mind, souls with the tensile strength of a single tissue. Maybe someday when we're all gone and the birds are still around, they'll think to sing a song in our memory...

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MENTIONS

- Junior Library Guild Selection
- Featured in Barnes & Noble's "30 Books to Inspire You this Summer"
- Featured in Amazon's "Editor's Picks for May"
- Goodreads First Reads Promotion
- LBYR Book Box Sweepstakes
- Book Expo Featured in-booth title
- LBYR Book Club Guide
- Amazon Vine Promotion



TWEET-LENGTH SUMMARY

Human one minute & glass statues the next, @saskwriter's #TheAbsenceofSparrows is a haunting coming-of-age novel about a plague that turns its victims into glass statues & a boy's belief that his town's missing sparrows can save his family as the world comes to a halt around

COMPS

- Stranger Things vibe
- The mystery of Alfred Hitchcock
- The adult crossover appeal of *The Age of Miracles*
- As scary as Kenneth Oppel's *The Nest*
- Uses nature as a lens to better see the world like *The Thing About Jellyfish*
- Like Stephen King, but writing for a middle grade audience

EDITORIAL REVIEWS

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