



★ **Creatures**

Crissy Van Meter

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Forty miles and a scenic ferry ride from Los Angeles lies Winter Island, whose residents can be transported back to the mainland in the case of an emergency. But it's undecided what constitutes an emergency in Evangeline's life: her estranged mother shows up unannounced, wanting to make nice; her fiancé is missing at sea; and a dead whale is trapped in the harbor a few days before her wedding. In *Creatures*, dealing with the whale becomes an exercise in exhuming the past as Evangeline sorts out what to keep and what to let go of among what she's buried.

Circumscribed by the island and her circumstances, Evangeline must acknowledge and recover from the piecemeal attachments she's experienced. Between her negligent father, absentee mother, and the basic precariousness and instability that's part of island life and part of the outcome of her father's choices, Evangeline's learned to live in the present's shallow pool, never asking for too much lest it plunge her into treacherous depths.

As *Creatures* transits its narrative arc, the expected tensions avoid predictable resolutions. Marriage and romance, mothers and daughters, friendship and motherhood, adulthood and death all make an appearance without any one becoming central. In every part, Crissy Van Meter balances fracture and fusion and navigates Evangeline's story with exquisite, racking grace. Particularly moving are the research notes from Evangeline's job at the Sea Institute; they interrupt the narrative and become spaces wherein the story of her pain is distant enough to approach. There, an all-consuming "you" emerges and demands that the whole world feel with her.

Filled with the "pressure of missing things, the leaving of things," and "the constant foreboding of implosion," Crissy Van Meter's bold debut novel is stamped with a signature, polymetric tension all its own.

LETITIA MONTGOMERY-RODGERS (January / February 2020)

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