



★ **Everyone Wants to Be Ambassador to France**

Bryan Hurt

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Bryan Hurt's sensibility is unusual and hard to describe, but that's what makes the eighteen stories that form his debut collection, *Everyone Wants to Be Ambassador to France*, worthwhile. There's a great deal of variety here, in a book that features an offbeat sense of humor and some genuinely moving story lines.

These stories—originally published in prominent literary magazines—are all distinct while reflecting Hurt's unique voice. The book's title is a reference made to James Garfield's assassin, Charles Guiteau, in "Vicissitudes, CA," a deeply odd story that features artist Miranda July as a character and builds to an unforeseen racetrack disaster. The memorable "Seagull" describes the complicated relationship between three characters who are hyperaware of their past lives, including a seagull and a goat reincarnated in human form; it is a story that takes surprising turns.

While these pieces stand out, some of the best stories in the book are also some of the shortest and most (relatively) straightforward. In the clever "Moonless," the narrator creates a white dwarf star that soon forms an entire small universe, complete with scientists he can converse with. "Panic Attack" is a meta-commentary on the fiction-submission process, with an e-mail rejection letter kicking off a struggle to figure out the meaning of the editors' vague requests.

Arguably the strongest piece in the collection is "The Sadness of Tycho Brahe's Moose," inspired by the famous astronomer's actual pet moose (actually, an elk he misidentified). The story tracks the animal's life alongside the highlights of Brahe's science career, creating an oddly poignant portrait out of a humorous premise.

Everyone Wants to Be Ambassador to France is a weird and singular work, establishing Hurt as an imaginative writer with skill across genres.

JEFF FLEISCHER (July/August 2018)

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