

Girl Factory

Jim Krusoe

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Is it possible to make yogurt—that bland, colorless, jiggling bowl of prosaic foodstuff— into a substance that’s not only creepy, but slightly macabre? If so, novelist and poet Jim Krusoe manages nicely.

In his first book, *Iceland*, Krusoe described the odd adventures of a typewriter repairman, who goes in for an organ transplant and discovers a woman who likes swimming in the pool where the organs are kept.

Girl Factory presents another strange everyman, this time named Jonathan, who works at a similarly lackluster job. As an employee of a mall yogurt shop, the narrator soon finds that the eatery’s owner is keeping a handful of women suspended, comatose, in vats of yogurt in order to prove a theory about the preservative powers of acidophilus.

Feeling regretful about some bumbling that kicks off his story, Jonathan is intent on saving the women to redeem himself, but is unsure about how to revive them without further endangering their lives. He sets out on a series of experiments with mice and rats, but visits the women in their yogurt-filled tubes, fascinated by how they look in suspended animation.

“Every night, my examination began with the woman’s feet and moved upwards,” he writes. “Her shins were as streamlined and smooth as the legs on a Danish Modern coffee table my parents once had. Her knees, friendly and yet fragile, were a symphony of flat and rounded planes, dimples and sinew.”

The way that Krusoe takes his time with description, trailing along a passage as casually as Jonathan examines a victim, gives the work a surreal feeling in the midst of familiarity. Like a hallway with off-color light, the words seem like they possess much more than what’s being conveyed, and the story meanders in the same loping pace, too quirky to be suspenseful, and yet too compelling to be ignored.

Krusoe’s expertise in poetry—he’s authored five books—is on display, fully, as he relishes each juxtaposition of words; a flamingo has a “shadowed hatchet” for a bill, and time has a way of “fishtailing down the track.” As he attempts to revive the sleeping beauties, Jonathan seems to get lost along the way, but with a darkly comic, absurd style that reverberates and satisfies like, well, a bowl of yogurt.

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