



Grace for Grace: Stories

Steve De Jarnatt

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Its stories united by themes of finding a home, Grace for Grace is poetic and avante garde.

Steve De Jarnatt's short story collection *Grace for Grace* pairs imaginative literary language with flawed characters in obscure situations.

In "Rubiaux Rising," a veteran sits out a destructive hurricane while detoxing in his aunt's attic. "Chronicles of an Umbra Hound" follows a young man's travels around the world, chasing solar eclipses and the girl who got away. In "Harmony Arm," an old farmer who's dying of cancer finds a feeling of belonging in a community of furies.

A woman at sea tries to make the most of her last moments when she encounters an epic blue whale in "Her Great Blue." In "Mulligan," frustrated parents from across the country converge in Nebraska, where a loophole in the law allows children of any age to be abandoned to the state with no repercussions.

Grace for Grace's characters suffer from a range of maladies, from loneliness to hubris to criminal tendencies, and they emerge from offbeat, ranging corners of the human experience. With eyes firmly on the skies, the eclipse-chasing narrator of "Chronicles of an Umbra Hound" has commitment issues; his resentment toward his parents gets in the way of his relationship with the woman of his dreams. Earl of "Harmony Arm" has held onto his anger and cynicism for decades too long. As he and other characters navigate their respective crises, the actions they take, and their introspective musings, reveal the inner workings of their psyches.

De Jarnatt's prose is poetic and avant garde, with both everyday and rare language manipulated in creative ways. Las Vegas is "all agleam with neon promise," with "distant hills silhouetted like a dead Lincoln lying there." Notable settings—including the seashore of "Her Great Blue" and the worldwide destinations that the "Umbra Hound" explores—are wrought in full detail in just a few nimble, eloquent phrases. Characters are easy to imagine, in all their blemished beauty, though the flow of their actions is sometimes obscured by the density of the prose. Because of the complex language, the pace of each story is meandering, even in entries that are just a few pages long.

The violence and despair inflicted on the characters—and that which they inflict on themselves—pulls them toward their redemptions and their demises. While each story fulfills its purpose pertaining to the characters' needs, desires, and flaws, the tales are united by themes of finding a home.

Grace for Grace is a varied, ornate short story collection that navigates the inner lives and outer experiences of characters whose origins are outside of what's ordinary.

AIMEE JODOIN (June 9, 2020)

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