



How to Accommodate Men: Stories by Marilyn Krysl

Marilyn Krysl

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The success of Marilyn Krysl's second collection of stories, *How to Accommodate Men*, rests on her unique ability to combine detailed descriptions of everyday life with the surreal experiences that enter reality. That said, some of her 17 stories about women interacting with men hit their mark more closely than others.

Strongest in the collection are the four stories centering on a civil war in an unnamed country, or countries. (Though the book jacket tells us it's Sri Lanka, the stories are more evocative and immediate when the action takes place in an unnamed land—that way, it could be almost anywhere.) Each story starts in concrete reality and moves in and out of dreamlike worlds, clearly conveying the mindlessness of the war the characters live with (not through, as no end is indicated or foreseen), a war made all the more incomprehensible by the fighting between former friends and neighbors. In "The Thing Around Them," a mother sees her life as a nurturing, warm globe of green air suffering rips of the civil war which take away her formerly peaceful existence bit by bit, until the globe suffers a final gash.

The title story, however, in which a woman makes a comfortable life for her live-in lover in order to manipulate him while he appears to be manipulating her falls short. Why would she prepare dinner, bake pat? for his party guests and vacuum for a man she didn't love or need or want economically or emotionally? She also pays his bills (subtly, so he won't know), ignores his other love affairs, and speaks highly of him to his important colleague. The skimpy paragraph of explanation—saying she does it to control all his moves—just doesn't cover it.

When the situations Krysl creates are more unbelievable than dreamlike, the short works fall flat. Her stories work best when they capture the believable surrealism of reality that is the trademark of most of the collection. (September / October 1998)

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