

Like a Bird

Fariha Róisín

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Fariha Róisín's novel sings of building joy within sorrow and spins a gossamer reverie that clings to the consciousness.

Taylia grows up on the Upper West Side as the less loved younger daughter of a mixed race family. Her father is Indian, but has sought to separate himself from his homeland, seeing Indians as “mosquito ravaged savages” and avoiding India’s traditional foods and media. Her mother is a white American Jew from a privileged background, “a woe-begotten liberal fighting for immigrant rights at dinner parties.” Taylia’s elder sister, Alyssa, inherited their mother’s complexion and monopolizes her love.

A tragedy topples the precarious family unit, leaving Taylia adrift and desperate for connection. She gains temporary comfort from a family friend, but is twice betrayed: he violently assaults her, and her parents blame her for the incident and throw her out.

Taylia is a frank narrator, and the novel crafts poetry from her candid observations and unadorned dialogue. In a brief but poignant exchange between the sisters, Alyssa asks “What do you define as freedom?” The question becomes a through line as Taylia seeks to find a new answer for herself outside of the overlapping shadows cast by her sister, her assault, and her neglectful parents.

The power of sisterhood is an enduring theme: Taylia builds a new life within the supportive scaffolding of a diverse network of women. Kat, a divorced mother of two, offers her a job and a place to stay, seeing her scars reflected in Taylia’s fresh wounds. Though hesitant to share her own story, Taylia blooms in the shelter of Kat’s unconditional compassion.

With its profound testaments to the love of found families and the courage involved in daring to open a cracked heart, *Like a Bird* is an unforgettable novel.

DANIELLE BALLANTYNE (September / October 2020)

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