

Love War Stories

Ivelisse Rodriguez

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Ivelisse Rodriguez's *Love War Stories* is a bold collection that marks the shortfall between romantic illusions and reality.

Here, love—abusive, storied, unspoken, obsessive, or enduring—is rendered in memorable forms. Whether narrated by a fifteen-year-old whose aunt pines for the husband who left her or by an office administrator whose memories lead her to stalk an ex-boyfriend, these stories reveal longings that ripple with consequence. Here, love involves a challenging negotiation between what Latinx culture fosters and what individuals want to believe. Rodriguez deftly portrays this tension before her characters reach their decisive moments.

Several stories feature teenagers whose ideas of love harden into defiance. In a Massachusetts high school, a narrator revises an ethnographer's study on Puerto Rican youth to include an insider's perspective. One of the girls portrayed, Veronica, then faces ugly rumors and fights she'd rather avoid. Another story examines a transplant to an upper-class school who experiences the widening gulf between her future, college-bound self and the neighborhood boy whose love she questions and wants. Both young women reveal their vulnerabilities, as well as the extent to which others impact them.

Stories that include slightly older narrators bring a different wisdom. In "The Simple Truth," a daughter curates an exhibit on poet Julia de Burgos while finding renewed respect for her own mother; the knowledge that history depends on perspective paves the way toward a reconciliation. In "Love War Stories," a college student reflects on broken relationships and decides—despite all that she's heard—that love is worthwhile. The choice turns out to be a fitting end for a collection that emphasizes the vibrancy of girls and women who refuse to believe that the needle is stuck on lamentation. In a refreshing twist, despite bitterness or betrayal, believing in love becomes less naïve than singularly hard-won.

KAREN RIGBY (University Press 2018)

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