

Make Way for Her: And Other Stories

Katie Cortese

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Katie Cortese's *Make Way for Her and Other Stories* offers enticing glimpses of curiously compact, womencentric fictional universes, generally focused on girls, teenagers, women, and the men who affect—but not necessarily impact—their lives.

Cortese's writing is smoothly compelling and adapts from voice to voice. Characters range from the young and perceptive Lily, dallied with by a married author in the hothouse atmosphere of a college town; to schoolteacher Maya of "The Bounce Back," who drives from Maine to Arizona in a vintage Corvette, looking for a fresh start. In "Lighter, Bluer, Clearer, Colder," little Brinna is full of everyday excitement for dolls and cereal, doughnuts and snowflakes, but her baby brother suffers from a heart condition, and it frustrates her that she cannot share her own energy and health with him.

In the stories that feature teens, their conflicted worlds are taut with discovery, self-consciousness, intense emotions, and burgeoning hormones so prevalent that one character comments how they can almost be smelled in the air. First kisses and encounters are recounted with near suffocating closeness, amid waves of heartbreak and feverish crushes like "silent blooms of sudden heat to be weathered."

Beyond adolescent intrigues, one of the collection's best stories is "Straight and Narrow," involving a weathered ex-con taking a basic cooking class and his surprisingly heady effect upon the course instructor. Over lessons of Hollandaise sauce and hummus, Cortese's words skillfully simmer, avoiding a dramatic boiling point with thoughtful, wryly humorous tension.

Though the varied women of *Make Way for Her* are emerging and evolving, making right and wrong choices along the way, for the most part they share an appealing internal wisdom that keeps them true to their real selves, and will hopefully also keep them on the right course.

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