

Meteorites

Julie Paul

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The stories in Julie Paul's *Meteorites* assess possibilities for growth in the wake of worst case scenarios. Loss and illness become opportunities for restoration that broken characters often overlook.

A man travels to Hawaii with the ghost of his quadriplegic father. "Even dead, you have selective hearing," he snaps. Twin brothers whose fight over a girl ended in tragedy hope to bury the hatchet. Best friends part ways during a high school field trip to Boston. A folk musician who offended her family by questioning their farming methods tries to mend splintered relationships.

Several stories teeter between realism and fantasy. In "The Expansion," failed entrepreneurs Holly and Don retreat to an island paradise that turns menacing when creatures grow to eight times their normal size. "Millie's Calling," the collection standout, stars a recent amputee who still shows up to play the organ at the First United Church, not willing to give up her place "for a minor thing like a missing limb," even when pain and blood loss cause hallucinations.

The title's heavenly bodies appear twice—once in "Little Stars," as a Perseids shower distracts a mother from her concern over her daughter's self-harm, and once in the title story, as an explanation for a UFO seen over an Ottawa quarry. That conjunction of the supernatural and the commonplace, urging characters to look beyond their grim situations, recurs in "Manifest," about a visit to an angel reader where dreams regarding the power of the mind take over.

Some stories are so weighty with plot and intense relationships that they resemble mini-novels, but Paul also packs significance into condensed phrases, like a "knife-in-custard wrinkle" and a "puddle of faces."

Hope for the best, but plan for the worst: the stories in *Meteorites* tantalize with the notion that magic might coexist with everyday life, supplying a counterpoint to the hard facts of sickness and grief.

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