

## On Tràigh Lar Beach

**Dianne Ebertt Beeaff**

She Writes Press (Oct 13, 2020)

Softcover \$16.95 (236pp)

978-1-63152-771-5

*The short stories of On Tràigh Lar Beach share a haunting atmosphere that's explored through refuse and music.*

The short stories of Dianne Ebertt Beeaff's *On Tràigh Lar Beach* cover women's experiences with woe and redemption.

The early vignettes are devoted to the back stories of items washed up on a lonesome beach in northern Scotland, where a visiting author looks for inspiration, but finds only sands made of ancient skeletons, scavenging birds, and howling wind—though wildflowers, after which each vignette is named, and against which the landscape's barrenness and the bits of rubbish are juxtaposed, suggest new life and possibility.

Then the beach-combing writer discovers detritus—items thrown from ships, and others that were lost during storms or discarded by accident. They become her subjects: a nylon dive flag cast into the water comes to represent revenge in a tale in which a wife takes upon her diver-husband, whose affairs she discovers at his funeral. A cigarette lighter in another story is compared to the Statue of Liberty's torch, and a washed-up actress, smoking in the statue's company, revitalizes when she's recognized by a fan.

A novella, "Fan Girls," joins these stories. It is devoted to four avid followers of the band Datha. In between their meetings at two concerts, the women share their stories and their connections to Datha's passionate, socially conscious music, as with an abused wife who, inspired by Datha's lyrics, escapes her husband.

The women's speech patterns match their approaches to life: one woman steals to scrape together money to see the band, and speaks in a rush that's executed without segues, showing her desperation and impulsiveness. The escaped wife's story, in contrast, proceeds in a creep, as she endures her husband's wrath and looks for an exit. The women's ample self-reflections and interactions make their characterizations feel robust.

Resurgence in the face of waste, loss, and desolation form an axis around which the stories pivot, while the stories' heroines exemplify determination and charisma, which is revealed through the development of their individual voices. Ella, a yoga retreat-goer, assesses the women in her sessions with biting commentary. Elsewhere, a candid email correspondence takes place between the mother of a girl who died in a car crash and a fellow passenger. Focusing on one item or woman at a time, the book crafts a message about universal longing, and, though there is death in the collection, a hopeful tone pervades it.

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MARI CARLSON (May 14, 2021)

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