

Pretend It's My Body

Luke Dani Blue

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Luke Dani Blue's powerful short story collection *Pretend It's My Body* chronicles the aftermath of questionable decisions.

A tornado picks up a young girl; when she wakes on the ground, she begins to see pictures that she believes are other people's experiences. A mysterious art exhibit of rocks begins multiplying and, in so doing, stresses a sixteen-year-old friendship. A pair of grifters posing as South American shamans decides that a "foreign kid" will add authenticity to their act, and they adopt a child. An elderly hoarder buys a thousand-foot hole and has it installed in her back yard, hoping her daughter will throw her into it when she dies. A trans person travels across the US on a forged ticket.

As these characters cut through their immediate external conflicts, many also face their own questions about identity, coming out to friends, family, or potential mates, or accepting another person's truths. Often, the characters find themselves so absorbed in their own struggles that they fail to see the complexities of the people around them, adding to the lyrical fallout of their decisions.

Whatever the context, trying to understand how and why people make decisions engines the stories. A transgender teenage witch can hear people's indecision emanating from their thoughts at the same time that she decides whether to reveal herself to her friends as a woman. In "Bad Things That Happen to Girls," the story twists from the expected and opts to instead explore the ways that mothers and daughters can both love each other and not see each other at all.

Smart and nuanced, the short stories of *Pretend It's My Body* mine inventive plots and fresh characters to race through the wreckage of bad choices.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (September / October 2022)

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