

★ Rabbit Island

Elvira Navarro

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In Elvira Navarro's story collection *Rabbit Island*, dreams and reality blur. The stories are surreal and disorienting, exploring dark and strange corners of the mind.

Of the collection's eleven stories, the first fits in a realistic mode, but the rest bend the rules of everyday experiences. An elderly grandmother floats in a corner. A woman discovers that the private memories of her dead mother have been posted on Facebook. Another woman discovers that she is dreaming other people's dreams. The stories are nightmarish, full of people struggling fruitlessly in bad jobs, strained relationships, and inexplicable circumstances.

Navarro's characters experience fear, regret, and anxiety about a world that's slipping out of control. Those who attempt to change, or even understand, their environments come to bad ends. In "Rabbit Island," a man combats squawking birds by introducing rabbits onto an island, with horrifying results. In "Paris Périphérie," a woman searches for an administrative office, but finds that landmarks and streets shift around her.

Unreliable, decaying bodies are a frequent theme. In "Strychnine," a writer begins to turn into a wild animal as a paw grows from her ear. Elsewhere, a vacationing man finds that his gums are dangerously, grotesquely infected. These bizarre, disturbing circumstances are described in vibrant detail. Settings—graveyards, dingy hotels, neglected city streets—are evoked in lively, precise language. Short, declarative sentences that come one after another make the unbelievable seem real. As befits the book's mood, Navarro resists easy endings, often leaving her characters still struggling, or even in more precarious positions than where they began.

Full of colorful, precise descriptions and sharp insights into the mind and body, Elvira Navarro's story collection *Rabbit Island* is inventive and atmospheric, arising where the everyday world ends and dreams begin.

REBECCA HUSSEY (January / February 2021)

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