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Foreword Review SHORT STORIES

★ Radium Girl

Sofi Papamarko
Wolsak and Wynn Publishers (Jun 1, 2021)
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Plain language and straightforward writing make ambiguity the exception instead of the rule in *Radium Girl*. In twelve whiplash-fast stories, Sofi Papamarko tackles belonging, grief, delusion, and consent with deftness and unique situations.

Breaking boundaries to explore ideas of othering, “Margie and Lu” follows a set of conjoined twins who are trying to fit in with their young adult peers. The story culminates with an impactful scene where one sister plunges their shared body into a sexual encounter.

A lighthearted, whimsical woman reaches her breaking point in “White Cake,” taking an unlikely course in dealing with her foes. A career-boosting dinner party spirals in “The Pollinators” because of a relentless, obsessive conversation and the alienated host’s sudden disclosure of marital tribulations.

A family follows a nuclear attack survival guide to the letter in the fascinating tale “Something to Cry About,” filling a fallout shelter with food and water and preparing an exercise program. A single missing item leads to the family’s unmitigated fracturing and a bizarre revelation. “Radium Girl” is wistful, powerful, and breathtaking—a fictionalization of real-life events and a tribute, all at once. Its cast works with the revolutionary material Undark. As they fall ill, one by one, a young woman finds strength in the radium, using it to defeat her oppressors.

Moving between Canadian and United States locales, the stories are all distinct, yet share a tension and darkness that’s not always apparent at the outset. Hints of the supernatural surprise, as in the changing photographs of deceased parents whose deaths both devastate their daughter and release her from their expectations. Attractiveness, inexperience, youth, and women’s issues are frequent themes, but are approached from dissimilar angles.

Easy and engrossing, the short stories of *Radium Girl* provoke unease and careful thought about diverse human experiences. They won’t easily be forgotten.

TANISHA RULE (May / June 2021)

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