

Somewhere in a Town You Never Knew Existed Somewhere

Nina Hart

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Hart's micro-fiction bursts through traditional genres, and her narratives make fun and absurd leaps in reality.

"Isn't it enough that I'm alive?" students ask their parents before being shot and eaten by school administrators because of low test scores. This is one of many chilling scenes in Nina Hart's *Somewhere in a Town You Never Knew Existed Somewhere*, her debut prose collection that pushes the boundaries of traditional fiction.

Through dozens of one- or two-page stories, Hart broadcasts a din of voices straining to speak and be heard. Chief among her protagonists are those often overlooked: small children, dead poets, animals, and veterans. With each, Hart's tone is dizzyingly frantic. One moment, she is playful to the point of provocation, and the next, she is deep in profound contemplation. The characters appear and reappear throughout the concise stories, all while Hart treats their breakdowns and breakthroughs as if they are of historic significance.

The most affecting of her stories center on kids. In "Bonanza Keeps Digging," a girl is forced to bury her dolls as a lesson in friendship, and she ends up burying herself. In "Chipper Dale," a prophetic boy predicts an impending tornado, and is able to save the lives of a band of frightened children.

Hart, a writer, performer, and teacher based in Asheville, North Carolina, also gives voice to elephants, cats, and cows. In "No Warning," after humans shrug off a sudden earthquake, Hart ends the story by zooming in on a cat whose "eyes are dark and far off with fear, his tiny solar plexus tight and huddled back onto his haunches."

Hart is trying to rattle readers into epiphany, using philosophizing cows and cannibalism to jolt our sense of reality enough to reach new understanding. But her stories are so brief and often so absurd, they end before readers can find out what exactly has gone wrong in contemporary life.

Certainly, though, there are many clever turns of phrase that inspire contemplation within the collection. And there will be those who delight in Hart's brave experiment with fiction and form.

AMANDA MCCORQUODALE (Spring 2015)

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