



Stoop City

Kristyn Dunnion

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Concentrated most in a pocket of downtown Toronto, Kristyn Dunnion's short story collection *Stoop City* is poetic in addressing disaffected urbanites: vagabonds, the poor, strung-out people, and those marginalized by society because they don't conform or can't afford real estate.

These stories are tantalizing because of their trail of loose connections: a character in one story might pop up in another. A Luddite tramp is gunned down by police during a student revolt turned looting frenzy in "Affliction;" he is mourned by his buddy and neighbor in "Last Call at The Dogwater Inn." The book follows up spatial metaphors even in stories like "Asset Mapping in Stoop City," wherein a sex worker works her territory and reminisces about the meanings of home and belonging; in another tale, the body's ovulation cycles are mapped by a woman who's desperate for a baby, while a cat colonizes her home and marriage. These connective strands shed psychic meaning on fragmented lives lived in disaggregated spaces.

Queer desire wends through many of the stories, constituting the collection's naked heart and unleashing carnal energy, demonstrating luminous wanting and universal humanity. In one tale, a teenage altar boy falls in love with his bully and tormentor. In another, a student develops a crush on her larger-than-life, eccentric housemate. Two sexually precocious teenagers compete for a pedophile's attention in "Daughter of Cups;" elsewhere, a teenage boy discovers that betrayal can occur in the smallest of strokes: mere absence of the beloved.

While the interior voices of different characters are sometimes indistinguishable, bleeding into the book's dominant poetic flow, the prose is rhythmic, with long then short cadences. Lush with unexpected metaphors that make beautiful the unlovely and unloved, *Stoop City* is a meaningful short story collection whose treatment of disenchanting lives is aesthetic.

ELAINE CHIEW (January / February 2021)

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