

★ **The Franklin Avenue Rookery for Wayward Babies**

Laura Newman

Delphinium Books (Jan 19, 2021)

Hardcover \$26.00 (240pp)

978-1-883285-96-8

Laura Newman's short story collection *The Franklin Avenue Rookery for Wayward Babies* features complex plots, covers considerable time and geographical space, and includes deep characters and relationships. Authentic historical, sociological, and environmental context is also provided, so that the stories themselves become like sagas.

While the bait differs from one narrative to the next, no moments are wasted before individual tales cast their lines, set their hooks, and reel in captive audiences. The first story's rod dangles a question from the title: "Can a starving girl ride her bicycle 400 miles to Kathmandu, fortified with a stolen wheel of yak cheese and a side of ham?" The second's lure resides within the mind of the first character to appear on the scene. Despite the fiasco resulting from her foiled attempt to pack her bathing suit with her ex-husband's ashes so she can swim them to their final resting place in the middle of Lake Tahoe, she finds solace from having saved a piece of him: one of his arms. The one with the hooked hand and tattoos.

Tragicomic story lines are swift as they travel across time and space, all while employing an oddball assortment of disparate narrators. Whether they are living, dead, human, or not, each characters' speaking style and perceptions are unique, true to their experiences of life and death.

Throughout the brutally uncertain, yet comically preposterous times depicted in the short stories of *The Franklin Avenue Rookery for Wayward Babies*, a common theme prevails: it matters not whether lost and lonely souls are too broken to heal themselves; through recognizing the lost, lonely, and broken in each other, none need ever be lonely again.

LINDA THORLAKSON (January / February 2021)

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