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Short Stories

The Tiki King: Stories
Stacy Tintocalis
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Finalist for the Iowa Short Fiction Prize, Stacy Tintocalis's debut collection exposes the remnants of apple pie America. The book renders an unsettled contemporary world with characters who try to reconcile their past. The scenes take place in the now familiar surroundings of Wal-Mart and Radio Shack aisles, and they're populated with familiar commodities—Wonder Bread, Wheat Thins, Campbell's Cream of Mushroom soup. Surrounded by this mass production, her idiosyncratic characters appear in sharp relief—and to splendid effect.

Among these characters is the son of the Tiki King of Burbank, California, who revisits his childhood home; a horror movie producer; a Safe House manager; and a wife who bears with her husband's utter love of a fabric. There's young Joey who catches a baby falling from a window. He might be a hero, but he's more than a type. "Just last week Joey played a sack of cement in a Human Relations class," Tintocalis writes drolly of the baby catcher. The author has a knack for finding the odd, authenticating detail. As a result, characters like Joey aren't just behind a page. They lean toward the reader. They seem personal and life-sized. One can neither sum them up nor predict them.

On page one, the reader is introduced to another full-blown character—a self-proclaimed "dognapper" wooed by the animal enough to break in to his ex-wife's home to lie against the small furry body—and on his ex-wife's bed, no less. The story (titled "Too Bad about Howie") won Tintocalis The Journal's 2010 annual fiction prize. The story stands out because of its unusual premise and the voice of its feckless narrator. As puppy stories are prone to do, the story skirts the saccharine, especially at the end. But this collection doesn't get gummed up with the sweet. The work is tempered with humor and pain. Feeble and yearning, these characters struggle the way characters in literary short stories are supposed to.

Tintocalis knows the tradition of her genre, as she has taught her craft at the university

level and is currently under contract for a fiction textbook with Pearson Longman. Her literary prose has been picked up by a slew of publications, such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Crazyhorse*, and *Fiction*. This collection will seal her as one of the country's emerging writers.

Janelle Adsit