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Short Stories

This Is Not Your City
Caitlin Horrocks
Sarabande Books
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It is July and we are a miraculous age.

With this, Caitlin Horrocks's debut offering of stories takes off in a blaze of promise and hope, full of startling clarity and writing that pulls the reader further and further into the book like a master weaver spinning her yarn taut and smooth. Add in a reference to *The Hobbit* on the very first page and it is clear that *This Is Not Your City* is a masterful work filled with all manner of complicated souls and torturous narratives.

The women in Horrocks's eleven stories face realities—and decisions—many readers will have never encountered. Some are ambitious and smart, yet stuck with deadbeat boyfriends or sick relatives who threaten to swallow their lives whole. Some are likeable, some are not: take Lyssa, who does nothing when a childhood neighbor repeatedly molests her sister; or the pregnant woman, now on her 127th life, who hates the child growing inside her; or Robin, a girl with skin "the warm color of an expensive coffee drink," who whiles away her time volunteering at the Museum of Maritime Rescue and hopes to one day get a job selling saltwater taffy or waitressing at the local strip club (Pirate's Booty). Isolation and grief tear bold streaks through the narratives, as do love and regret, fear and underachievement.

Horrocks's writing is full of wit and color and smells—lipsticks are described as "lichen reds and bruise purples"—with one particularly sensual passage describing a set of beeswax soaps: "That summer, their bodies smelled like honey, and they could lie in bed under the ceiling fan and press their noses against each other's skin and smell the slow scent of sated bees in a field near the Benzie River."

Horrocks, who lives in Michigan and teaches at Grand Valley State University, has had stories published in *The Pushcart Prize XXXV*, *The Paris Review* and *Tin House*. She recently won the Plimpton Prize from *The Paris Review*.

The book will appeal to readers who enjoy strong, multi-faceted women who face extraordinary circumstances, like those in Stewart O'Nan's *The Good Wife* and Alexandra Fuller's *Don't Let's Go to the Dogs Tonight*. It's a dizzying, soul-baring read from a writer who's sure to make her mark on the literary scene in the years to come.

Dana Rae Laverty