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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ SHORT STORIES

Twisting Roads: Where the Road Ends

June Zetter
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Dark, moody characters populate stories with surprising plot turns.

The "twist" is an essential element of many stories, as in the works of Ambrose Bierce and O. Henry, writers who relied on sudden, overturned expectations to give a final jab to a tale and burn it into their audience's memories. June Zetter attempts to set out on a similar path in the four short stories included in her new collection, appropriately named *Twisting Roads: Where the Road Ends*.

Zetter—a mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother—has lived an exciting life, having performed in theaters and done stunts in her younger days, in addition to having published two previous books (*A Blade of Grass* in 2010 and *Frizzled Like Fried Eggs* in 2012). Excitement is also a word that carries through to her fiction—Zetter's stories can't be said to lack action or suspense.

What they do lack, however, is the careful review of a good editor, and unfortunately, this results in a book that can be difficult to read at times. Zetter's sentences regularly run on without proper punctuation, and paragraph breaks are few and far between. While this does keep the stories' momentum charging ever forward, when the relentless pace is combined with unclear sentences, the prose often requires rereading. For example, the first line of the story "Time has no Bounds" reads, "'What a great night it had been' Colin was pleased with himself he had won at poker."

And further down the page, redundancies slow the pace, with three descriptors of a woman: "He looked at the table deciding which place he would like to play from, when his eyes alighted on a blonde busty gorgeous woman."

The pieces have something to offer fans of horror or dark fiction, but there are no monsters here except the human characters themselves. Though leavened with occasional hints of the mystical, even the supernatural elements follow the tradition of ghost stories that rely more on setting and mood than on outright confrontation.

Perhaps because of the stories' short length, the twists in these narrative roads can be abrupt, with the characters sometimes seeming to exist only in anticipation of their eventual fate. One character moves quickly—and with little apparent reflection—from jealousy to murder, while others meet carefully arranged, but unlikely, ends. Some readers might enjoy the unpredictable nature of these characters' fortunes, but others will find themselves quickly removed from any sense of suspension of disbelief.

Judging by her output over the past few years, Zetter clearly has plenty of tales to tell, but future books will require a more careful eye from the author or an editor in order for the potential of those stories to be realized.
PETER DABBENE (September 23, 2013)

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