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Foreword Review SHORT STORIES

Waiting for the Cyclone

Leesa Dean
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These stories are peopled with unconventional women navigating between freedom and family ties.

The thirteen stories in Leesa Dean's vibrant *Waiting for the Cyclone* range across the Americas, depicting characters who long for meaningful connections and temporary escapes from disappointing realities.

Appearances are deceptive in these tales: a driver and a hitchhiker make assumptions about each other based on looks, a confident nonconformist gets stuck in a suburban rut, and true love often faces hidden complications. In the title story, the narrator recalls a trip to Coney Island with a former boyfriend. Their shaky relationship, based on mistaken identity, couldn't survive an ill-fated ride on the Cyclone roller coaster.

Most of the stories begin in Canada, but travel—if only through flashbacks—to the USA or Latin America. Other countries symbolize the fleeting chance to escape ordinary life: staying with an uncle's family in Arizona briefly seems like a taste of normality for the twelve-year-old narrator of "Malad," while a one-night stand in Mexico gives Alison a respite from infertility struggles, in "Libertad."

Snippets of Spanish and French flavor many stories with the diversity of the North American experience. Descriptions of natural scenery add cinematic depth, as with "snowflakes pixelate the night" and "the sky was all gunmetal clouds." Narrative voices are nicely balanced. "The Four Bradleys" splits the point of view four ways, reflecting how a departed loved one leaves divergent memories behind.

Motherhood, especially mothers sought and lost, is another robust element. In "September," a teenager takes a road trip to find the mother who left her on a church doorstep when she was an infant; in "Shelter from the Storm," the main character can't decide how to inform her partner that she's pregnant. Yet the mother-child bond remains strong, with a mother's sudden illness bringing the narrator of "One Last Time" straight back from Mexico to British Columbia. These themes are poignant, all the more so because—as the acknowledgments reveal—the author's mother passed away before she could read the finished book.

These stories, peopled with unconventional women navigating between freedom and family ties, give an out-of-the-ordinary window into contemporary North American lives.

REBECCA FOSTER (Winter 2017)

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