

Book review by Michael Radon

*“Dad smiled, a glimmer of hope tickling his mustache. He’s always wanted to believe there’s more between me and Marlene than a plate of cookies.”*

Through the medium of the short story, characters are introduced in moments when their candles are burning the brightest. The reader is served a cross-section of these fictional lives in a manageable fraction that packs the most flavor and impression into the smallest number of bites. One might not expect these defining scenes to include the quitting of one’s job to discover one’s true calling in authentic mozzarella cheese, or a frustrated series of phone calls between two people whose love never really got to reach its potential even after decades, but life often happens before it can be prepared for. This compilation of evocative stories and scenes thrusts readers into the unexpected, only to be dazzled and captivated by raw emotion, personal insight, and the occasional water buffalo.

From the first page, the author’s meticulous and masterful choice of language makes its presence very clear and offers each scene as a window into the soul or just a perfect description of a dark, snowy day. Each story, for the most part, provides entirely new locales and lifestyles that are so stark that a description of wallpaper pattern manages to land on equally thunderous footing as a revealed closed-door affair. There is a constant mystique of potential in each selection as if the characters are capable of any imagined outcome, and it makes for an addictive and entertaining read to see which possibility becomes final. Artistic, curious, and with an arsenal of emotional gut punches, this is a collection of short stories that belongs in the library of any thoughtful, off-center reader.

RECOMMENDED by the *US Review*