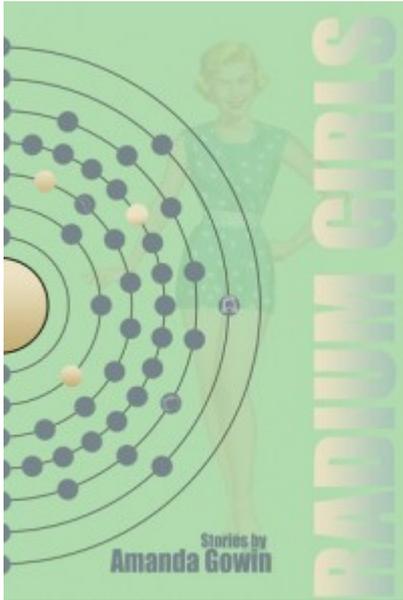


Radium Girls by Amanda Gowin

written by Guest Contributor | December 14, 2014



Amanda Gowin's debut collection, *Radium Girls*, strips away the skin and flesh of everything we know and exposes the fetid marrow of life that runs through us all. It's a journey through lives that are connected by a need to be coupled- emotionally, spiritually, sexually, and hopelessly.

The novella "Pink Manatee," tells the story of Bridget, a white witch come spiritual guide for many of the patients in a mental institution where she too is residing and receiving treatment. Bridget buries many things in the institution, like dolls for the woman who lost her child, or poetry for the man with the stammer. These are acts born of hope. Bridget believes that there is no harm in offering hope, or herself, if it makes someone else's life more bearable. It's this self-sacrifice that extends beyond the perimeter walls of the institution to Eddie, her ex-roommate's brother. Eddie picks Bridget up on her day release in his El Camino. Eddie has a girlfriend. Eddie is bad. This moment of freedom and adventure is the only consent Bridget needs to be the accomplice, and bed-partner. When Eddie needs to sell some stolen radios and pulls Bridget along for the ride, she meets a fence called Max, part *Street Car* Brando and part David in *The Lost Boys*. If you want love, here it is, but be warned; all schematics, blueprints and templates have been ripped up. Blistering and slick dialogue pierce through both characters in a vulnerable edge that acts as the thread that pulls them together.

The shorter pieces are dream-like in construction, some more abstract, some more poetic in design. There are zombies, twins, addicts, Pomeranians, the moon, clocks and all the tiny pieces of life we overlook. Gowin is the tornado, lifting the flotsam of society and spinning it around and around until it lands just South of Kansas where magic and colour is just beyond their reach. There is no yellow brick road in Gowin's world, only the brittle shards of broken dreams to walk upon.



Craig Wallwork is the author of books, *The Sound of a Loneliness*, *Quintessence of Dust* and *Gory Hole*. He is also the fiction editor at *Menacing Hedge* journal. He currently hides in West Yorkshire, England.