



Criminals: Love Stories

Valerie Trueblood

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Valerie Trueblood is, simply put, one of the finest story writers who is currently working in the American language, as prize committees acknowledge. In this, her beautifully made third collection, each of the fifteen stories asks two defining questions: *What kind of love story is this?* as well as, *Who here is exactly what kind of criminal?*

In “His Rank,” an armed man enters a bar to claim the girl he understands to be his destiny only to be told she has, the weekend before, married someone else. In “Skylab,” in which lovers have run away together to work medical relief in Malaysia, the young woman is reading the Koran to learn what it says about adulterers even as she waits for satellite debris to rain down on her. She’ll be punished, won’t she, for the crime of happiness? And in “The Bride of the Black Duck” a new widow falls in love with an entire complicated family in her neighborhood, with whom she’s suddenly, irrevocably plighted her troth: she is theirs, just as they are hers.

In *Criminals* the stories are linked by theme, the characters often tender, movingly, but flawed; that is they are *realistic*. Love is hard won. When violence erupts it too is utterly convincing.

With her keen eye, her fabulous ear and her generous heart, Trueblood’s aim is to find characters in moments of true extremity when they are united in passion, connected not only to one another but to themselves. And—as with violence and as in real life—love erupts surprisingly, emerging out of the smooth blue surface of the mundane.

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