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THE SOMETIMES LAKE

Sandy Bonny

Reviewed by Joyce Nickel

The stories in *The Sometimes Lake* reflect Sandy Bonny's passion for science. Whether the character is a teacher working with disadvantaged indigenous children in Canada's far north, as in "Nògha", a career academic grieving for her miscarried children in "Carys", or a child exploring the mysterious world of Grandma's cellar in "Marrow", Bonny artfully slips in just a bit of scientific fact or interest. This playful ability to weave science into a story is a technique that I've greatly admired in Barbara Kingsolver's novels, and also in *Fugitive Pieces* by Anne Michaels, and it is a technique that I enjoy here too. In fact, I would say that it's the book's outstanding feature.

The Sometimes Lake is made up of twelve stories, none of which is called "The Sometimes Lake", so the book's title is a mystery to me. And it is a short book—just over 150 pages long. Within those pages, however, the author covers a range of topics, characters, and locations. One of the strongest stories is "Mandala", a non-linear and somewhat messy story where a young Canadian boy tells vignettes about his unconventional life, including the incident where he and his sister are suddenly stranded in a Himalayan Buddhist nunnery after their mother dies from blood poisoning contracted after accidentally cutting herself with a dirty knife. This story came in second in the 2001 CBC Literary Awards, and it was also printed in *enRoute*, the Air Canada in-flight magazine. Another story that stands out is "Traplines", in which Dustin—now renamed Polydeuces, or P.D.—haplessly attempts to escape from a cultish commune.

Perhaps my favourite story in the collection is the somewhat creepy "Sense". Here, a young woman camps alone for a few days in a dry canyon in order to complete an archaeological survey. While she is sifting sand in search of past treasures, a more sinister element of modern society is active around her.

Sandy Bonny is from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and is one of those incredibly talented and accomplished people who seem impossible to be true. Aside from creating unique and well-written short stories, Bonny paints imaginative landscapes in acrylic, carves large snow sculptures that win awards at winter festivals, and is currently writing a novel. She has a PhD in Earth and Atmospheric Science, and has been actively involved in promoting scientific literacy, writing widely for both popular science and academic journals.



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