

Book Review

Such a Lovely Afternoon. By Patti Flather. Inanna Publications, 2022. 227 pages.

Reviewed by Hiedi Cuppage

After the last few years, having mainly read articles about health care, and autobiographies and memoirs written by comedians, I found Patti Flather's stories a welcome change. I enjoyed how powerful, independent, and confident Flather was able to make her main characters, even while they were at their most vulnerable.

In "Typhoon," Flather depicts a relatable story, from longing to be a young person making a life in another country, to actually pulling off that life and making it feel realistic, through to the continuous yearning for being "home" while also trying to embrace new realities in a new land. It's as if she has filled in the gaps missing on HGTV's *House Hunters International*, capturing some of the things that don't change just because your landscape has: a long commute, trying to fit in, finding a purpose or a job that gives meaning to your days, questioning if you've overburdened your partner by having them buy into the adventure. This was the first story in *Such a Lovely Afternoon* where I found myself hooked on Flather's words.

"Piss and Vinegar" paints a picture of anyone who has ever rented anywhere with that one terrible landlord who makes promises straight out of the gate and seldom follows up, hoping that your desperation of keeping a home, any home, will trump you caring about renter's rights, and that you'll give up on the hope of any follow through and just keep sending the monthly rent accordingly. This is matched with another strong character, Wendy, who continuously finds ways to make a life for herself, even though it's not the one she had envisioned. The intergenerational friendship that Wendy forges with her neighbour, Inez, and the trouble they get up to in the name of vindication against Wendy's landlord, made me laugh out loud more than once. Even at times of desperation, there are glimmers of hope—whether it's finding a plumber or a warm meal, you never have to worry about Wendy and there's something to that.

“Stumbling Home” gave me great pause. This felt like the most northern-focused story of all, though I am not sure if that’s because of my own life experience. Having moved from the East Coast to northern British Columbia to work at a newspaper, and years later working for the courts and clerking a coroner’s inquest myself, this story almost felt like Flather has captured parts of my own life at earlier stages. In only sixteen pages, she captures the heaviness of small-town life in the most impossible and heartbreaking of times, and touches on navigating and building relationships through it all. Not an easy feat even if she had written a hundred pages to try and do so, yet she delivers.

“Sarah Is Under the Table,” is about the beautifully heartbreaking reality of anyone who has ever loved and lived with someone with dementia, and the complicated layers that can come when the person you’re taking care of is your family through marriage, but you don’t know them very well as people. Leah finds herself living with her mother-in-law, Margaret, and there’s a lot of overlap between caring for a toddler and someone with dementia that gets touched on throughout. Flather incorporates Indigenous culture and language preservation at times, when you can imagine the lights of Margaret’s eyes sparkling as they’ve never fully lost the ability to make bannock or remember Gwich’in words when trying to explain a recipe or a place. I like to think some of the times I’ve learned the most about people I admire is when they’ve been making something they’ve made a thousand times; when they’re paying mind to cracking an egg rather than to you directly, and they open up about some of the more painful parts of going through life. This story allows for those moments to unfold and a meaningful, respectful relationship to form, even when Margaret is not fully herself anymore.

“Such a Lovely Afternoon” is heartbreaking and touches on mental health issues, the loss of a parent, and the burden and difficulty of having to go on through it all—and the surprise shoulders we lean on and connections we can rebuild during those times.

While I initially felt there were more characters than pages within the first few stories, all in all Flather does a heartwarming job of creating characters we care about and can relate to along the way, with sprinkles of laughter even at the most jarring times.

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