In the Quiet Season and Other Stories. By Martha Amore. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2018. 130 pages.

Reviewed by Natalie B. Pendergast

The style of high-quality metaphor Martha Amore uses in her 2018 collection of short stories *In the Quiet Season* can best be described as down-to-earth. With uncanny precision, she nails descriptions of the North, of the working class, of young love, and of the "what if" fantasies her characters often explore and intimately share with her readers. These characters are well cared for and handled poetically by this doting author. Unafraid to take creative risks in order to do justice, verbally, to the nuances that characterize common relationship woes, Amore crafts her prose using a delicate mix of highbrow eloquence and references to relatable, ordinary, lowbrow minutiae. Formally, metaphors are exacting, familiarity-generating, and clear—but the subject matter may be as everyday and small town American as orange buffalo sauce or a grubby blue bandana.

The first and eponymous story, "In the Quiet Season," is the literary equivalent to a lesson in trust. In fact, adding connotations to the word trust is its principal accomplishment. Momentum is created through the gradual surfacing of raw and unconscious human drives that work their way into discursivity. Amore easily slips into the sometimes oppositional perspectives of her main character, who is justified in his burst of anger, and also in his subsequent regret. Of course, nature is a primary theme, both human and regular.

"Geology" is a tale of romantic loves: the long, comfortable love of marriage; the sharp, achy love of sexual attraction; forbidden love; and love lost. Minerals, rocks, and gems—the stuff of her main character's expertise—become symbols of the preciousness and rarity of true love. Refreshingly, that a certain love is between two women is not what makes the protagonist's affair "forbidden."

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Like other stories in the collection, "Pike" is about a couple's relationship and the networks of memories, resentments, and comforts of which it is comprised. But all the unravelling and revelations of the marriage are intensified by the concurrent theatre of the landscape; the unfolding and witnessing of natural phenomena: the stunning appearance of a large pike.

In the fourth story, "Long Weekend," Amore demonstrates her talent for having her characters experience a credible change of heart—flipping the script, haiku-style—solely due to their own internal self-analysis. Ride-or-dies are not always what—or who—they first seem to be, as this short story teaches us.

The brief tragedy of "Painkillers" is wrapped up in the main character's jealousy: his downfall. More than the other stories in this collection, this one epitomizes what is by now an apparent knack on the part of Amore for establishing dread, paranoia, and anxiety as the main obstacles her characters face. Self-sabotage takes care of the protagonist's heretofore enviable life and love. The only question is, was he jealous of the other man, or of his girlfriend's ambition? An unusual nouveau-riche middle-aged man embodies a Greek chorus of wisdom or realism.

Cut out of her mountain climb by changes in the main character's womb, the silent "b" in both words turns out to be analogous to the parts or feelings that remain unsaid in "Weathered In." But unlike the previous story, the main character's fears and anxiety do settle down enough before disaster strikes. A mix of feral and tame, much like their adopted half-wolf puppy, the characters evolve quickly after a life-altering event forces them to strike a balance between their competing needs. A longer short story, this last one acts as a crescendo to the collection, which mostly features newcomers to Alaska. Making it to the end of the book structurally resembles Amore's repeated line "they say if you last three winters, you stay"—for the characters, unearthing their primal fears much like the wild animals that punctuate their narratives, are not so much Alaskans, as they are Alaska itself.

Aesthetically curated, the stories complement one another, just as the book's cover art by Indra Arriga balances the warmth of a fiery parka against a blue and white cityscape—that is more scape than city—and silent solitude, with huddling buildings that are both civilized and inhuman at once. It is not so much a northern society Amore paints, but rather

disparate Alaskan twosomes. Most main characters lead quiet lives with simple relationships that are suddenly disturbed by a startling epiphany, fear, or event. The build-up is tantalizing but slow, and doesn't scrimp on introspective detail on the part of her usually first-person narrator.

This book is an important work of fiction not only because it captures the feeling of isolation that all human beings harbour deep down, but because it matches that internal emotional iceberg with the external isolation of the frozen, mountainous setting. Alaska is to the rest of the United States as Amore's rustic sensibility is to the American literary canon: her writing style is altogether Americana, but with the distinct echo of novel, northern, faraway Alaska. Cloistered characters working through inner turmoil while succumbing to the sublime Alaskan terrain—this is quintessential Amore.

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