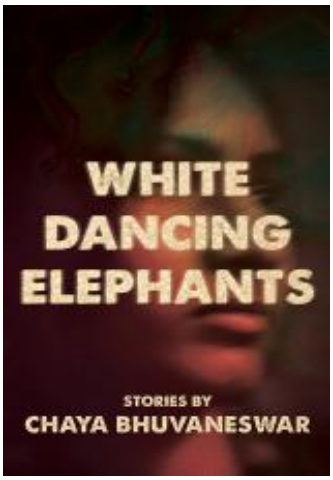
White Dancing Elephants: Stories

by Chaya Bhuvaneswar



About the Book

A woman grieves a miscarriage, haunted by the Buddha?s birth. An artist with schizophrenia tries to survive hatred and indifference in small-town India by turning to the beauty of sculpture and dance. Orphans in India get pulled into a strange ?rescue? mission aimed at stripping their mysterious powers. A brief but intense affair between two women culminates in regret and betrayal. A boy seeks memories of his sister in the legend of a woman who weds death. And fragments of history, from child brickmakers to slaves in Renaissance Portugal, are held up in brief fictions, burnished, made dazzling and unforgettable.

In 16 remarkable stories, Chaya Bhuvaneswar spotlights diverse women of color --- cunning, bold and resolute --- facing sexual harassment and racial violence, and occasionally inflicting that violence on each other. Winner of the 2017 Dzanc Short Story Collection Prize, WHITE DANCING ELEPHANTS marks the emergence of a new and original voice in fiction and explores feminist, queer, religious and immigrant stories with precision, drama and compassion.

Discussion Guide

1. How are different forms of closeness and intimacy represented, in the stories ?Talinda,? ?The Story of the Woman Who Fell in Love With Death,? ?Orange Popsicles? and others? How might friendships between women form a type of solidarity and strength against violence and sexual harassment experienced by women?

2. Had you heard of the histories described in some of the shorter stories --- of Indian-Portuguese slaves, captured by Portuguese invaders to India, brought back to Europe to serve nuns in convents? What about the impact of the Bhopal disaster on child laborers? How did the very brief glimpse of these historical events, in these stories, make you feel about the events described?

3. Art and the project of creating art assumes many meanings through these very different stories. In ?Neela: Bhopal,?

the art of brickmaking, the art of imaginative play among children; in ?Heitor,? the art of the heist. Poets are critical in stories like ?Newberry? and ?The Bang Bang,? and in ?Chronicle of a Marriage, Foretold,? a woman artist?s diorama plays a role. How did the collection make you think about the processes involved in creating art (whether visual or literary)? Did it make you reflect about whether you might like to create art in your own life? If so, how?

Author Bio

Chaya Bhuvaneswar is a practicing physician and writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Narrative Magazine, Tin House, Electric Lit, The Rumpus, The Millions, Michigan Quarterly Review, The Awl, jellyfish review, aaduna* and elsewhere, with poetry in *Cutthroat Journal* (2nd place in the Joy Harjo poetry contest judged by Cornelius Eady in 2017), *Natural Bridge, apt magazine, Hobart, Ithaca Lit, Quiddity* and elsewhere. Her poetry and prose juxtapose Hindu epics, other myths and histories, and the survival of sexual harassment and racialized sexual violence by diverse women of color. She recently received the Dzanc Books Short Story Collection Prize, a MacDowell Colony Fellowship and a Henfield award for her writing. Her work received several Pushcart Prize anthology nominations this year.

Critical Praise

"A magnificent collection of stories that defy conventions, stereotypes, and reveal the universal complexity we all share as humans --- gifted and flawed individuals, who struggle to reconcile the mixed signals of our own hearts."

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