

Walking Leonard And Other Stories By Sophie Stocking

May 15, 2021 by Hollay Ghadery



I read the majority of Sophie Stocking's *Walking Leonard and Other Stories* in an emergency room. I'm reminded of that as I flip through its pages and see a parking stub from the hospital marking a passage from the story "Murdy".

In this passage, an architect and new mother, Moira, is taking a bath with her baby, Murdoch (Murdy). Murdy managed to cover himself in black Tempera washable paint while Moira was on the phone with her boss, who was gently, but unapologetically, letting her go because "where will it end?"

He refers to Moira's inability to strike the ever-elusive work-motherhood balance.

"She stares at his belly and realizes that the paint stained him grey wherever it touched. She gets some shampoo and tries to soap it off, but although the stain lightens, he looks like he's been bruised all over. My God if the public health nurse saw this, or heaven forbid Elizabeth, they'd call Child Welfare. She fills an empty shampoo bottle and lets the water run over his shoulders to wash away the soap. Tears meander hot trails down her cheeks, She and Murdy, and the next six years till Lyle's done residency stretch before her like an endless tunnel. She covers her face with her hands and tries not to scare him by making any noise."

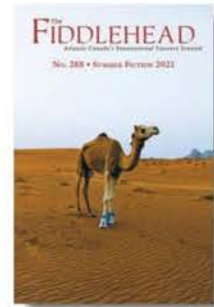
I marked this page thinking of how Stocking had so wholly captured the opposing and nuanced parts of the scene. There's the privacy (mother and child sharing a bath) and then there's the intrusion of public (Moira's anxiety over what her friend and Child Welfare would think). There's also the mother (the person who will stay strong and not cry) vs. the individual (the person who very much needs to cry).

This conflict of desires and identities runs through all the stories in this compulsively readable collection. Much to my delight and Stocking's credit as a writer, there's no attempt to simplify or

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reconcile these often disparate parts. Stocking captures them though; incomprehensible and quotidian as they really are.

It's not the big decisions that shape us most, after all. Much like water over rock, it's the steady mundanity of all our little choices—walking the dog, taking a certain route to school, not locking a door—that shapes who we are and what we become.

This truth struck me as fitting at the time I read it. I was at the hospital because I'd cut my wrist on a sharp, dried plant shoot while gardening and the infection had spread up to my elbow. I'd put off going to the ER because of COVID, I was anxious and I have four kids at home. I didn't want to bring any sickness home that would harm them. I'd gone outside to the garden because of COVID, I was anxious, I have four kids at home and needed a break from them.

When the nurse called my name to see a doctor, I thought of the infection burning up my arm and my bubbling anxiety. I thought of Moira and the small, impossible and inevitable decisions we make every single day. There's a story here, I'd thought, and if there's someone who could capture it, it's Sophie Stocking.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Burdened by the notion that a career should encompass everything, Sophie Stocking changed her major so often, she narrowly escaped a degree in General Studies. Sophie found the courage to pursue fiction at the Alexandra Writer's Centre and went on to study under Aritha van Herk at the University of Calgary. Her debut novel *Corridor Nine* was released by ThistleDown Press in 2019.

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"...conflict of desires and identities runs through all the stories in this compulsively readable collection."



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Hollay Ghadery is a writer living in small-town Ontario. Her fiction, non-fiction and poetry have been published in various literary journals, including *The Malahat Review*, *Room*, *Grain* and *The Fiddlehead*. In 2004, she graduated from Queen's University with her BAH in English Literature, and in 2007, she graduated from the University of Guelph with her Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. She is the recipient of the Constance Rooke Scholarship in Creative Writing, as well as Ontario Arts Council grants for her poetry and non-fiction. Hollay is the force behind River Street Writing—a collective of freelance writers who create exceptional content and provide creative consultancy services for personal and professional projects. Learn more about them at www.riverstreetwriting.com. Her first book is *FUSE*.



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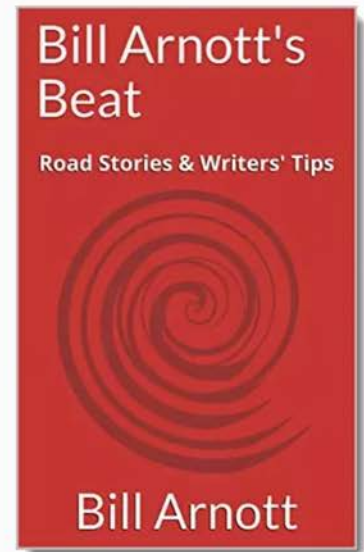
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