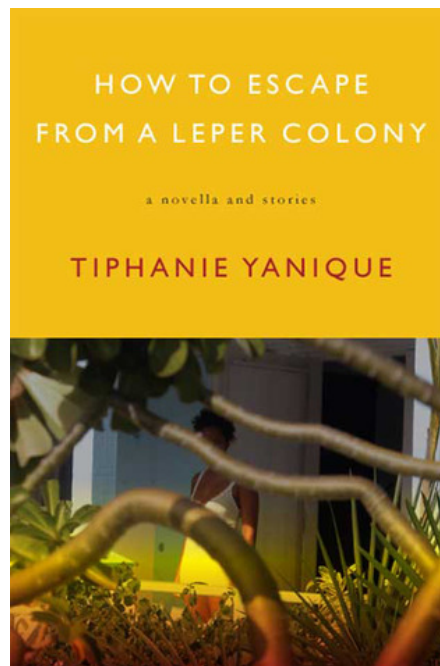




How to Escape from a Leper Colony

Tiphane Yanique

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Tiphanie Yanique

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An enthralling debut collection from a singular Caribbean voice

For a leper, many things are impossible, and many other things are easily done. Babalao Chuck said he could fly to the other side of the island and peek at the nuns bathing. And when a man with no hands claims that he can fly, you listen.

The inhabitants of an island walk into the sea. A man passes a jail cell's window, shouldering a wooden cross. And in the international shop of coffins, a story repeats itself, pointing toward an inevitable tragedy. If the facts of these stories are sometimes fantastical, the situations they describe are complex and all too real.

Lyrical, lush, and haunting, the prose shimmers in this nuanced debut, set mostly in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Part oral history, part postcolonial narrative, *How to Escape from a Leper Colony* is ultimately a loving portrait of a wholly unique place. Like Gabriel García Márquez, Edwidge Danticat, and Maryse Condé before her, Tiphanie Yanique has crafted a book that is heartbreaking, hilarious, magical, and mesmerizing. An unforgettable collection.

How to Escape from a Leper Colony Details

Date : Published March 2nd 2010 by Graywolf Press

ISBN : 9781555975500

Author : Tiphanie Yanique

Format : Paperback 182 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Magical Realism

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From Reader Review How to Escape from a Leper Colony for online ebook

Wendy says

There is beauty in words. Beauty in a story. And beauty in the characters that fill those stories. Tiphanie Yanique captures all of that in this collection of stories and a novella, steeped in culture and life.

The characters are the main thrust of each of Tiphanie Yanique's stories. And with many of them, the endings gave me pause. The stories may not be wrapped up with a neat little ribbon at the end, but they certainly offer one food for thought. Yanique's writing style is lyrical, and, while several of the stories are straight forward, with others she takes creative license. I was reminded of how much of an art writing can be. I found myself wanting to take my time with each story, lingering over the words and taking in the experience. For each story truly is its own experience.

There was not one story in the collection I did not like. In fact, I'd come across one story, decide it was a favorite and then claim the next was a favorite too. This happened over and over again.

One of my favorites was "Street Man", about a drug dealer who falls for a straight girl. He is so focused on his own life and his own perception of their relationship, keeping the street out of his relationship with her, that he misses the fact that she may have a life and ideas of her own. There is also the story about a young woman who is sent to live in a leper colony, isolated from the rest of the world. She befriends a young man whose entire world is the island, and they both long to be free. I was moved by "The Bridge Stories: A Short Collection" which is a series of stories seemingly independent of one another but interconnected at their core. Another of my favorites was the novella, "The International Shop of Coffins", covering moments in the lives of three very different characters. The story begins the same in each case, and yet each story is unique but equally sad.

The collection is made up of eight stories all together. The stories are about love, despair, regret and longing. They are about dreams, both lost and hoped for. They are set mostly in the U.S. Virgin Islands, touching on several different cultures and lifestyles. This is one of those books that would make a great book club selection, if the group is willing to take a chance on a collection of stories.

Kim says

Some of these stories are absolutely brilliant.

Wilhelmina Jenkins says

A dazzling diversity of characters in stories set in numerous Caribbean locations. Beautifully written. As in any collection of stories, some are stronger than others, but the characters' voices are amazing.

Damolami says

Read this again for the 3rd time and since my memory sucks, it was like the first time. A collection of short stories mostly based out of the Caribbean. I thoroughly enjoyed it. And will be reading it yet again in 2 years.

Kristina says

Wow.

Shannon says

I love that this book has a hodgepodge of characters. With many of them being immigrants, or the children of immigrants to the Caribbean, they are exceptionally diverse in race and religious backgrounds. Observing how these individuals bond or separate based on these differences adds depth to the stories. Then there are moments you completely forget you are reading about people that have differences at all.

The originality in some of these stories was pleasantly surprising. As if the stories themselves weren't captivating enough, I was enthralled by method she uses to tell the last two. The same setting is visited three times but from the point of view of three different characters.

I was familiar with this author because of Land Love and Drowning but decided to read this book first. If her second book can top this little short story collection, then she will certainly secure a place on my list of favorite authors.

A full review is over on the blog: <http://www.readinghaspurpose.blogspot...>

Becky says

I'm really excited about this author. Unfortunately, I read this book in a moment when short fiction was not really what I wanted at all. Even so, the stories wove their way around me.

Tiphonie Yanique has a way with words. And sentences. And story construction. What blew me most away about her writing style was her ability to shift seamlessly in and out of different voices and perspectives. I also really liked how, although the stories were what my elementary kids would call "realistic fiction," some of them seemed vaguely tinged with magical elements--plot constructions that weren't necessarily 100% believable at face value but made perfect sense in the context of the story.

There were a few recurring themes about which I have lingering questions. For example, there were a large number of relationships that ended because someone misunderstood a situation, ran away, and then regretted it for a long time to come. It makes me wonder about fear and running away and holding on and how that works especially in the context of the islands. I liked how she explored islands and bridges as symbols.

I do feel like I could have gotten a lot more out of this book if I had read it at a different time. Some stories resonated with me much more than others. But I'm going to keep an eye on this author, for sure.

Cheryl Klein says

You know how everyone always says that small presses are publishing the most innovative and interesting work? (Well, if you hang out with the book nerds I hang out with, you do.) On bad days there's a small skeptical voice inside me that says, "Yeah? Are you sure they don't just get sloppy seconds?" Then I read a book like *How to Escape from a Leper Colony* and I'm like, "Hell yeah, small presses are where it's at."

The book is billed as "a novella and stories," but actually several of the stories read like novellas, with multiple POVs and sweeping arcs of time. Yet the narration is sharp enough that it would work for flash fiction too. Yanique's characters are a diverse collage of Caribbean island dwellers, from lovelorn prisoners to coffin makers to Carnival dancers. They are black, white, creole and Indian; Christian, Hindu and Muslim. They aren't prone to happy endings, but they seem to live in a world in which love is plentiful.

My favorite quote from the title story: "Christians love leprosy.... Jesus cured lepers. Leprosy gives the pious a chance to be Christ-like. Only lepers hate leprosy. Who wants to be the one in the Bible always getting cured? We want to be the heroes, too."

Shivane Ramlochan says

Excerpted from the full review:

"I loathe exaggeration, especially when it comes to enthusiasm. I prefer my praise to be as precise as possible. Sadly, this means that much of my best loved phrases must languish, unused, waiting for true beauty to capture them. One such is borrowed from a film – to feel something “like a riot in the heart, and nothing to be done, come ruin or rapture.”

Tiphonie Yanique's premiere publication is impressive. A collection of short fiction and a novella, 'How to Escape from a Leper Colony' is remarkable in that it feels neither solely craft nor character-driven, yet reads as a spellbinding marriage of both. Here is short fiction to get you excited about the genre entire. Here is a novella you will want to reread until the people in it are achingly familiar to you, a novella which shows its full lustre in its unabridged format, as opposed to the more dim showing it made in Akashic Books' 2008 anthology, 'Trinidad Noir'. At a handful of pages shy of the two hundred mark, Yanique's prose begs to be read in one sitting. I read it cover to cover in bed, bleary-eyed with intensity, and when I reached the last line of the last story, 'Kill the Rabbits', (which I would have loved to see further fleshed out into novella form) I felt that I had not had enough."

You can continue reading my full review of 'How to Escape from a Leper Colony' at Novel Niche! :)

Joanne says

I almost want to say I hated this book, but I don't. But, my overwhelming dislike of so many things in this book force me to negate the few things I do like.

First, I admire Ms. Yanique's talent for writing. And, there were some parts of some of the stories that were actually intriguing, funny, or evocative - or sometimes all three. Unfortunately, those instances were very few in comparison to the things I don't like.

However, I'm left with nothing but a bitter taste after reading Leper Colony. I feel that there is an overwhelming bitterness to all the stories and characters and I find that very difficult to reconcile with real life. Typically, I find any fiction that is full of hard to like characters (and non-sympathetic ones, at that) difficult to read. Of course, there are hardships and sadness in life - but there seems to be a thread of utter despair and hopelessness that just leaves me cold and completely apathetic to the characters.

Furthermore, while having the diversity of cultures and character identities found in Leper Colony is admirable, it creates for me an unauthentic voice for all. Each story feels contrived and forced. Even, and especially, much of the dialogue is written poorly, in my opinion. It all seems so affected and overdone. I can appreciate the points that Ms. Yanique may have been trying to make about race, class, culture, and social struggles. However, it feels as though these stories were written as an experiment - "let me see how many issues I can write about in this short story"...so that every sentence and paragraph is fraught with an insincere heaviness. Perhaps if any one story were longer, and given the opportunity to develop over a longer period of time and the stories were able to evolve more subtly, I would feel more inclined to embrace this book.

Unfortunately, I just find very little to like or enjoy about any of the stories in this collection outside of the occasional well-written turn of phrase or scattered beautiful sentences or thoughts.

James Hauenstein says

Interesting. Written so you can visualize.

Alex Scales says

Aside from the "International House of Coffins" novella, I have to admit this collection wasn't really a favorite. Yanique loves playing around with dialect, and actually puts some of the most difficult stories to get into right up front, making for a frustrating reading experience. However, for a first time author, it's remarkable how much control she demonstrates in these stories.

Yanique is interested in examining how the forces that influence our identity-- race, culture, language, gender, religion-- and how blurred those lines have become. We have Brits using Indian slang, black islanders with English accents, nuns . There isn't a single character you can fit into a single box, as Yanique is constantly forcing the reader to reexamine how we picture each character.

With narrative leaps between so many distinct voices, you would be forgiven for assuming this is a confusing book. There's a couple tricks preventing it from ever becoming too overwhelming: firstly, we might not be able to force a label upon the characters, but there isn't a single voice struggling to comprehend their identity. Every character is confident in how they identify themselves. Secondly, Yanique does an admirable job managing each character's voice with her own storytelling style, so the prose never stops feeling like a story, even with all the jumps.

As for the negative.. I suppose the prose just didn't grab me. Several stories left me quite bored, or unsure of what to really think of what I had just read. Yes, lots of interesting questions are being raised about what

identity means, and where we are now. If anything, these are stories trying to provide evidence of that. But I'm not sure I'm getting anything else out of it. Still, I'd be willing to read more from Yanique.

Tayari Jones says

Such an excellent book. Tiphonie Yanique has amazing rang. She inhabits so many voices and so many hearts.

Tenli says

Wonderful writing from a writer who comes from somewhere I know very little about. Her stories capture a variety of points of view with simple yet lyrical prose, and the emotional tone is spot on. I especially loved the story about the Coffin Shop, which is told Rashomon-style, from multiple points of view. Thanks to my intern who introduced me to this writer. I am very excited to read her novel next.

Maxwell says

3.5 stars

This collection of short stories and two novellas revolves around characters in the U.S. Virgin Islands. What I enjoyed about these tales were how they were modern day stories that read like folklore. She is attentive to sights, sounds, and tastes of the islands as well. They were very rich, and the characters were complex.

The title story was a great way to start the collection. But my favorite story was "The Saving Work." It had a great contrast between mothers and their children, jumping between the U.S. and the Virgin Islands. There were interesting gender dynamic as well as age differences.

Many of these stories deal with love and romantic relationships. The final novella "Kill the Rabbits" did a great job of intertwining narratives and dealing with racial tensions. It really leaves an ambiguous feeling of how to solve issues between races. However, I felt like the whole islanders trope was a bit over the top and read more like a caricature than a genuine commentary.

Overall, nothing completely blew me away about these stories. I'm happy I read them, but only 1 or 2 really stick out to me. The rest are not totally memorable.
