

Prisms, Veils: A Book of Fables

David Bentley Hart

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In theologian David Bentley Hart's erudite short story collection, characters from Greek myths and literature have happenstance encounters with scholars and others.

Hinting at both focused, rational ways of understanding the tangible world and the nebulous mysteries that remain beyond the grasp of human beings, these fables have moody environments and highbrow narrators. Many are about people's elusive yearnings across time, with complementary references to antiquity and philosophy.

In one tale, a classicist encounters a nymph whose figure he idealizes, and she teases and evades him. Elsewhere, a man in his twilight loves his childhood friend, who makes poor decisions in her romances until he summons enough courage to intervene. However, the fulfillment of their desires may have only been a dream. And in another story, a Western academic contemplates Japanese ideas on transience while wrestling with ceremonial suicide attempts. In other entries, a soon-to-be bride is enchanted with an unusual mirror, and a researcher on mnemonic techniques builds a memory palace but loses control of it—a fascinating take on failing to reach across boundaries.

The stories' unexpected endings are intriguing. Many conclude on the precipice between fresh understandings and loss. People brush against beauty that seldom lasts, whether it's seen in women or in the contemplation of aesthetics (as occurs in a duo's discussion about how a story in progress should mirror itself). In their uneasy, fragile relationships, there's a distant sense of the Christian New Earth, which the present only approximates—but which could satisfy all of these characters, if only they knew how to reach it.

Marked by unmet longings, *Prisms, Veils* is a dense, colorful collection of fables that trouble the delicate border between worlds.

KAREN RIGBY (July / August 2024)

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