

Tales for Tra-La-La Day

Steve Michael Reedy

Tom Fee, Illustrator

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A whimsical short story collection, Tales for Tra-La-La Day shows cheer triumphing over bad intentions during the holidays.

Steve Michael Reedy's *Tales for Tra-La-La Day* is a sparkling short story collection about a joyous holiday celebration.

Midwinter, a traveler moves through the snow toward Tra-La-La Day festivities, which include feasts, dancing, songs, and blessings from the Iceling Queen. He regales his companion, a listener referred to with affection as "Monkey," with a series of fairy tales set around and during Tra-La-La Day. Interspersed throughout the book are intricate black-and-white sketches with wood-grain textures. In them, human beings appear as blackened storybook shadows, befitting the mysterious whimsy of the tales they accompany.

Featuring lilting sections of swift, singsong rhymes, the book delights in chaos and free-spiritedness, its prose ebullient. In "Melody and the Musician's Song," a mother enraptures her daughter with a bedtime story about the origins of a song sung on Tra-La-La Day. Metacommentary about basic storytelling structures wends in:

You've only heard the beginning. The beginning was very nice; it was the middle part that got a bit messy. But like most stories, no one could see the middle from the beginning, and before anyone thought to stop it from happening, the middle of the story was already there.

Infused in this high-spirited, enthusiastic storytelling is zany, often outlandish humor. For example, in "Trendable's Long-Lastables," the mayor's wife interjects a hilarious explanation of the origins of the ostentatious centerpiece decoration contest that occurs each holiday season, with thorough details on how her great-grandmother "began making winter centerpieces to fight the smell of [her] great-grandfather while they were stuck inside for the winter. It worked so well that other women began creating centerpieces to hide the smell of their husbands." Such eccentric personalities lift the collection, which features a wide array of creative individuals, including schemers, musicians, an artist mistaken for a witch, and a wishmaker at the bottom of a well.

Upholding loving-kindness is central to all of the short stories. Abounding in magic, "The Tale of the Iceling Queen" begins with the iconic queen melting the icy heart of the Spirit of Winter; experiencing newfound feelings of heartwarming love, he revives her from human death, transforming her into a miraculous creature of snow. In this stunning romance, the queen then devotes herself to protecting the Spirit of Humans from evil monsters that feed on misery and malcontent, always risking dissolution into a flurry of snow if her homecoming from Tra-La-La Day is late.

And beyond the boisterous fun of each fable come social criticisms: People who twist Tra-La-La Day for their selfish purposes, including materialism, greed, or tyranny, are criticized. The darkest corruption occurs in "The Traveler and the Preeminent Miss Pinberry," wherein a woman mobilizes her inherited wealth to maintain cultish control over a town's children, sorting them into "good" and "bad" lists in the false name of the Iceling Queen. This judgment, which

enforces arbitrary and snobby rules of politeness, mires the town in unthinking silence. Nonetheless, the potential for redemption always remains: "Sometimes we have to experience what unconditional love isn't before we can understand what it is."

Educational, mirthful, and playful, the short stories gathered in *Tales for Tra-La-La Day* are rollicking as they celebrate love and empathy.

ISABELLA ZHOU (December 3, 2024)

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