



# **Domesticated Wild Things, and Other Stories (Prairie Schooner Book Prize in Fiction)**

*Xhenet Aliu*

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Just down the highway from Connecticut's Gold Coast is the state's rusty underbelly, the wretched, used-up sort of place where you might find Xhenet Aliu's *Domesticated Wild Things*: the reluctant mothers, delinquent dads, and not-quite-feral children, yet dreamers all. These are the children of immigrants who found boarded-up brass mills instead of the gilded streets of America; they're the teenaged girls raised in the fluorescent glow of Greek diners, the middle-aged men with pump trucks and teratomas. These are people who have fled, or who should have. And if they are indeed familiar, it is because Aliu writes what is real, whether we ourselves, her readers, have seen it up close or not. And her stories make sense in a way that matters.

A young mother buys into a real-estate investment seminar offered on an infomercial, only to be put back into her place by a bully in foreclosure. A closeted wrestler befriends a latchkey seven-year-old neighbor who harbors secrets of her own. A YMCA counselor tries to reclaim shoes stolen by a troubled young camper.

What they share is a biting humor, an eye for the absurd, and fumbling attempts at human connection, all rendered irresistible—and as moving as they are amusing—by a writer whose work is at once edgy and endearing and prize winning for reasons any reader can appreciate.

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