



The Prescribed Burn

Laryssa Wirstiuk

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Constantly overcome by the noise in her head, aspiring young artist Veda can't seem to loosen her grip from anything beyond her control.

A hesitant and sometimes misguided journey to develop her talent for visual art eventually opens Veda's passage to self-acceptance and maturity.

In these 15 stories, you'll meet Veda at both her best and sometimes most unlikable worst. Bonus material includes a crowd-sourced 16th story, questions for discussion, and creative writing exercises.

The Prescribed Burn Details

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From Reader Review *The Prescribed Burn* for online ebook

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

As soon as I saw this promoted as 'stories for anyone who couldn't relate to Holden Caulfield', I was sold -- *The Catcher in the Rye* is a very strong least favorite of mine. I love coming-of-age stories and Wirstiuk's collection of vignettes immediately grabbed me as I just was smitten with our unlikely heroine.

Veda, from a Ukrainian family in New Jersey, is an aspiring artist. She's self-absorbed, sad, moody, friendly, uneasy, lovely. Veda is the kind of friend I would have liked to have in college, as new to sophisticated life as I was, plunging headlong into what we perceived, for good and for bad, as proper grown up life. She fumbles through relationships with men -- 'Not Homecoming', the story on her attempt to lose her virginity, was hilarious and heartbreaking, and all too awkwardly familiar -- and works to be satisfied with her looks while being deeply insecure about them.

Wirstiuk tells the story through Veda's eyes, and the narrative is a mix of selfish ruminations and poetic moments (like *...the skyline showed some of itself between buildings like a woman performing a striptease* (p76)); I laughed and cringed in equal part. You can download a sample story for Wirstiuk's website to get a taste of her writing style. She -- and her Veda -- were the anchor to this collection and the reason for reading, and I loved how flawed and real Veda was.

The book itself is as much a treat as the stories; the collection opens with a series of captioned photographs, one for each short story, as if Veda were presenting this as an art project of her own. There are discussion questions, creative writing exercises, and Veda's Guide to a Creative Life, treats that extended my time with this book and Veda. Wirstiuk ran a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds to print this volume, and donors were able to fund a final short story by providing a word or phrase. I was dubious, but Wirstiuk made it work.

A fabulously engrossing debut, and worth splurging on -- e-book or otherwise -- as Veda stuck with me, and I'm missing her like I do a far-away friend.

Kiersi says

This collection of short stories revolves around the life of Veda, a second-generation Ukrainian girl growing up in Jersey, learning why girls diet, why boys are irresistible, and how art ties it all together.

I believe there is a particular kind of reader for every particular kind of book. *The Prescribed Burn* is a book about growing up--for grown-ups. It's about realizing your friends are shaving their legs and no longer eating Pringles, and how that realization, at one point, changed your life. The storytelling style is thoughtful and long-winded, which really works for the type of collection this is. It's a meditation on coming of age as a girl and coming to terms with your shortcomings.

Veda's experiences will ring true with anyone who's done the hard work of getting through adolescence without needing serious therapy. She's an everygirl with a punch; someone who speaks to you without being too forward, but doesn't shy away from the stories that make us all feel human--those embarrassing, unlikable moments that, somehow, make a heroine like Veda even more likable.

Wirstiuk is playing a tricky flute with *The Prescribed Burn*. She weaves Veda's vignettes from many different points in time. A lesser writer might have told them all in the same style, but Wirstiuk firmly places each of her "Vedas" in their respective voices. Pubescent Veda, gawking at the other girls and their tight shorts and pink lip gloss; high school Veda, who's (unfortunately) on a diet herself now; even college-aged Veda, wrestling with a tempestuous love life. Each speaks with a familiar, and yet distinctly age-appropriate voice.

At first I thought it was strange that the anthology bounces around in time (we go from grown Veda to middle school Veda) but the stories are thematically-arranged, and not chronologically. That would be too linear for an author with a sneaky streak like Wirstiuk. And it works.

There was some fluff in *The Prescribed Burn* that I could have done without--at one point, Veda observes someone wearing a "two-carat diamond princess cut engagement ring"--but I don't think it detracts too much from the flow and style.

This is a book I can see lending to my mom, my best friend, and my little cousin, and they will all get something different out of it. A good (and often surprising) first showing from a new author. (And, if you read my GR feed, you might remember that the prologue made me cry. Yeah. I admitted it. SO WHAT.)

Ryanfeu92 says

As a 20 year old male, I didn't think I would find this book—which documents the life of Veda, a Ukrainian girl/preteen/teen/adult—relatable.

Was I wrong.

"The Prescribed Burn" is much more than a biography; it is a coming of age tale. All of Veda's experiences are shared: issues of body image, low self-esteem, fears of growing up, intimacy, lasting intimacy, success, and acceptance. Through the eyes of Veda, Wirstiuk projects an image of ourselves, and the life journeys that we are all on.

And, as a lifelong resident of Hudson County, I found myself appreciating the text even more. Hoboken, Wildwood, the Tick Tock diner, New York City, the PATH, have all been elements that I, too, have grown up with (yet, this isn't a story exclusively for New Jerseyans; as I've said, anyone (and anywhere) can relate to Veda's experiences).

Megan says

Very unique book! I've never read anything like it. It was definitely a divergence from the genre I typically read, which is science fiction, but it was refreshing. I empathized with Veda throughout the book. I can see this as a TV show! I look forward to more books from this fantastic author.

Jamie Godfrey says

What I loved most about this book was Wirstiuk's honesty and compassion for her protagonist, Veda. I could picture her walking beside Veda, guiding her, but letting all the raw emotion flow. There were several tender, funny, and relatable moments. I could see a great deal of myself in Veda and for me that connection made this book unputdownable. :-) Highly recommended.

Judy says

We meet Veda in this collection of 15 short stories. I sort of feels like a novel because it involves the same main character and her family and friends. The stories are not told in chronological order, I am not sure why the author did that, but it doesn't detract from the reading at all. It's a bit like sneaking a peek in someones diary at various times and you just open it to a random page and sneak a read.

Veda's story is told with candor and open-mindedness. She is a young woman experiencing unthinking adults in her life, accepting her body as a young teen, her first boyfriend, being on the pill, having a job, trying to get her life in order (whatever that means).

I enjoyed the reading of these short stories.

Laryssa Wirstiuk tells it like it is or at least was for her probably. To be able to go through these painful times in our lives and then write about it is a wonder to me. I hope Ms. Wirstiuk continues to write and be published. I especially like the bonus materials in this book. There are 15 color photographs, a crowd sourced story that is very interesting, book club discussion questions and creative writing exercises.

Alfred C. Martino says

Laryssa Wirstiuk is a wonderful new writer! Her short stories are elegant and pithy.

Zach says

The Prescribed Burn collects 17 stories about adolescent and young adult doubt. Veda, the main character in all these stories, is in the process of figuring things out, and what is that process if not the doubting of oneself? More importantly, though, it is the process of questioning the social and societal norms to which we feel required to adhere. Veda doesn't always break free of the mold of "young American/Ukrainian woman." She's not always a reliable narrator. But even when she's in the midst of self-deception, she's honest in her desires. She wants the right thing even if she can't always see the morality of her own situation.

These stories read young, in that they examine issues that don't carry over completely into adult adult (as opposed to young adult) life. Hopefully, by the time we're 30, some of these issues have been conquered or pushed to the side. The book's value, then, is to remind us of the way we used to feel, because those same feelings are still with us, just grown up like our bodies. Doubt and insecurity are, even to the boldest of us, something we learn to live with, not something we purge completely. In that way, I think the book functions like a memoir, and I don't doubt the historicity of much of the content.

As I have never been a young woman, the author probably would not consider me to be her ideal reader, but the human condition in her stories transcends age and gender, and like all good literature, *The Prescribed Burn* should appeal to readers from all demographics.

Jennifer says

I rather enjoyed this series of short stories. Veda was easy to relate to and goes through many similar experiences that most teens and early twenty-year-olds do. This was a self-published book and I enjoyed the bonus material (discussion questions & writing prompts). One thing that stopped me from loving it, however, was that the narrative at times was too distant. I would have liked more description about how Veda felt about what was happening to her, or simply more general description to add atmosphere.

Elizabeth says

While I prefer the linear narrative of a novel to the short story format of this book, I did enjoy the story telling. Each story's ending left me with something to think about. I related to the pressures felt by the main character, Veda, especially in the story "Welcome to America," and felt that the author narratively pointed out many common themes of growing to adulthood that American women face, including all the burns.

Nate Jordon says

"I was always trying to piece together the broken pieces."

Welcome to the life of Veda, the main character in *The Prescribed Burn*. Laryssa Wirstiuk's collection of short-stories explores the life of a teenage girl as she develops into a young woman, putting all the broken pieces together. These stories are a search for the self, an identity, in a patchwork of stories and photos. All the big questions are explored: Who am I? Where am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? But, most importantly: What does it all mean? Growing up in our convoluted society and culture where gender roles and identities are shoved upon us by what's on the magazine rack in the grocery checkout line, by what we see on television and in the movies, is not easy, especially for a teenager, and especially for a young woman. If you want religion, it's here. If you want sex, it's here. If you want introspection, it's here. In the end you will find freedom with Veda . . . a freedom once caged, and then escaped.

"I wanted to unravel each of my emotions like yarn . . ."
