



# Women Who Live in Coffee Shops and Other Stories

Stella Pope Duarte

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Everybody says that the owner of Sal's Diner is a former Mafioso, but nine-year-old Joanna, whose mom has worked for him as long as she can remember, has a hard time believing he's a Mafia retiree. But one day, when two fat, toothless men who look like the Godfather's brothers show up at the diner, she wonders if maybe the rumor is true. And when Sal is arrested a few days later, Joanna's mother not only runs the diner while he's in jail, she also leads the charge to save him. Can the women who frequent his diner--the League of Women Who Live in Coffee Shops--save Sal from doing hard time in prison?

Set against an urban backdrop of seedy motels and dilapidated houses next to industrial buildings and railroad tracks, Stella Pope Duarte's award-winning stories follow characters who make up the city's underbelly. Some strut through the lethal streets, flamboyant and hard to miss--flashy divas, transvestites, and prostitutes, like Valentine, "one of the girls who decorated Van Buren Street like ornaments dangling precariously on a Christmas tree." Others remain hidden, invisible to those who don't seek them out--bag ladies, illegals, and addicts.

Many of the stories feature young people who know too much, too soon. An eight-year-old girl, with the help of a hooker, finally meets the addict father she has never known. A boy falls to his death and though his older brother is blamed, young Sarita isn t sure her fourth-grade classmate was responsible. And two children, unbeknownst to their parents, befriend a suspected child molester.

Winner of the University of California's Chicano / Latino Literary Prize, this collection of short stories set in Phoenix, Arizona, reveals the hard-scrabble lives of people living on the razor-edge of city life.



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