*The Making Sense of Things,* by George Choundas rev. by Mylene Moreira

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*The Making Sense of Things*, by George Choundas, is a short story collection that blends reality with fantasy in order to provide the reader with vivid and strange characters who give significance to even the smallest moments in life. Choundas, winner of the New Millennium Fiction Prize and a two-time Pushcart Nominee, has work in over fifty publications, including *The Best Small Fictions 2015*. *The Making Sense of Things*, shortlisted for the Robert C. Jones Prize for Short Prose, follows the lives of multiple lively characters as they find themselves in situations that prove strange yet unforgettable.

Choundas’s narrative proves to be unique from the very first page due to the style in which he structures sentences, constructed in a manner that permits him to take the reader into delightful mini journeys that allow for stories within stories. In doing this, he is able to control the structure of each story carefully and skillfully, and this talent gives him the ability to capture the reader’s attention and not let it go until the last sentence. Paired with the distinctive tensions that are present within the stories, such as a honeymooner in Venice who accidentally commits murder, the gruesome ordeal that Little Red Riding Hood has to overcome in order to free her grandma from the wolf’s stomach, and a teenager who has both of his eyeballs plucked out by a woodpecker seeking revenge, the collection is difficult to put down. The tensions are made tangible and realistic to the reader since the settings that are included in the book include a wonderful town named Pleasantville, a revamped setting of the story of Red Riding Hood, and a world in which people have two hearts; all of these come alive through the amazing descriptions and attention to small details. Additionally, the strong tones present within the stories, including grief, love, anxiety, fear, and accusation, help elevate the tensions and add a realistic aspect that juxtaposes beautifully with the stories’ fantasy-like features. As a result, the reader is able to sympathize with the characters in each story as they are confronted with situations that arise. Themes throughout the collection include grief, loss, desperate love, and the hope that follows from dark and disastrous situations; these themes keep the stories’ tensions and tones clear, consistent, and impactful upon both characters and the reader.

 *The Making Sense of Things* would best be enjoyed by readers captivated by stories that seem realistic but turn extraordinarily vivid and fantastical, as well as anyone keen on spontaneous and passionate characters. These are great stories, with distinct twists that push the normal into something beyond, with ever clever and memorable resolutions.