



# **The Source of Life and Other Stories (Pitt Drue Heinz Lit Prize)**

*Beth Bosworth*

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From “The Eight Rhetorical Mode”

Later he asked, “Would you like to go for a hike sometime?” and two trains of thought left the station: *He means to get to know me and we might leave the city together and it’s been a long time since I climbed a mountain.* That train chugged into a wider brighter country all the time. The other train went by another route through the panicked interior. *He’s a lunatic, it whistled. He’s been in and out of hospitals. He will take you to a mountaintop and throw you right off into the bright air: choo choo!*

Post-divorce dating is one more cause for celebration (or a quick call in to the police) in Beth Bosworth’s revelatory new book, *The Source of Life and Other Stories*. The spine of this collection is a series of linked stories about Ruth Stein, a Brooklyn author whose first book has exposed her father’s abuses; while the voice here, speaking across a lifetime, ranges from bittersweet to humorous to lethal. In other stories Bosworth’s narrators—a mother left to care for her son’s suicidal dog, an editor haunted by a dog-eared manuscript—seem to grab hold of the reins and run off with their fates. Meanwhile Bosworth explores the extended family, the bonds of friendship, an apocalyptic Vermont, the rank yet redeemable Gowanus Canal; also rites of passage, race relations, divorce, middle-aged romance, dementia, funerals, alcoholism, and the Jewish religion. Reality is just another stumbling block for Bosworth’s characters, who might help themselves but don’t always choose to. There are leaps of faith here, nonetheless, as the collection dispenses a kind of narrative psychotropic for survival and redemption, with a chaser of humor mixed in.

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