

This review was published in  
The Age A2, Saturday 16<sup>th</sup>  
February 2008, p 25.

## SHORT STORIES

Dianne Dempsey

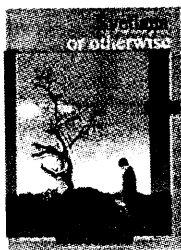
# Finishing on a twist or a curl

### **Svetlana or Otherwise**

By Tiggy Johnson  
Mockingbird, \$20

MOST OF THESE STORIES ARE about domesticity but that does not preclude some startling denouements. In *A Dash of Milk* a new mother struggles through the long days of her baby's crying by comforting herself with tea. "Janet tapped her foot while waiting for the kettle to boil, pretending she couldn't hear the screams from the bedroom." And so the tension builds up and up . . .

Not all of the stories have a twist in the tail. Some simply finish with a curl. In *Wooden Spoons and Ladybirds* a forsaken young girl takes a train ride and then gets off at her station. But by the end of her journey we feel her anxiety in our own stomachs.



The most successful story, however, is the least domestic. In *Svetlana or Otherwise* Tiggy Johnson successfully flexes her post-modern muscles. As a writer she frets and considers the various ways she can help the reader understand the suffering of her character: a woman who loses her family to radiation sickness in the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster.

Johnson's short stories have been published in a variety of magazines and have done well in several short-story competitions. So it has been a natural progression for her to bundle her babies up together and send them out into the world. They travel well. Her tight, clean sentences are a pleasure to read and keep our attention.