FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ GENERAL FICTION

A Bright Soothing Noise

Peter Brown
University of North Texas Press (November 2010)
Softcover $14.95 (224pp)
978-1-57441-291-8

In *A Bright Soothing Noise,* Peter Brown offers readers an edgy collection of short stories that unflinchingly explores pivotal moments of change in a set of desperate lives. Intense and often stupefying, the eleven stories in this collection invite readers to journey the seemingly acrid interiors of a hob-knob collection of characters trudging through the minutiae of daily life. From dead-beats and alcoholics to strippers and pubescent intellectuals, Brown peels away superficial layers to reveal the monstrous beauty of finding meaning and belonging in a sterile, unfriendly world.

Brown's characters, who live on the periphery of society in quiet desperation, their connections to the world tenuous, often fleeting, serve as one of the major strengths of the collection: An absentee father, chugging Sprite and driving a Corolla, coasts along the highway suddenly desperate to return to his family; a young waitress in love with the rough, dismissive affections of an old, Haitian cook; or the delightful ramblings of a young literati who finds the heart of humanity in a set of rambunctious farm pigs. Brown's expert characterization of their vulnerabilities and perspectives is razor-sharp and original—there is nothing begrudgingly familiar about these stories. Readers may have met these characters before—what's a contemporary collection without a waitress in love, or a dead-beat dad?—but never quite like this. Brown's cut-throat style, his ability to transcribe desperation and longing into the interior landscapes of his characters brings them thrillingly to life.

Though this haphazard group of misfits face vastly different circumstances, they are connected through Brown's refreshingly unique control of language and their interior landscapes, haunting and throbbing with frenetic energy, unify the collection. This collection does not contain re-hashed prose—what is seemingly old and overdone is made new again, every description serving as a focussed gaze into character motivations. Wired and clinging frantically to nostalgic ideals of the family he left behind, a character watches the sunrise through his rearview mirror. For him, the "sky blossom[s] like a black and yellow flower" the image toiling with the heat of delirious expectation.

In this way, Brown's descriptions depict a sort of painful beauty—there are never sudden epiphanies or uplifting revelations in these stories; instead they resonate with the reader in dark but meaningful ways. Like the young scholar in "The Slaughterhouse" who, looking into the face of a pig recognizes the "terrible desire to be understood," the stories in this collection reverberate with a sense of longing for connection. Winner of the Katherine Anne Porter Prize in Short Fiction, this collection will appeal to readers looking for a raw and moving read.
SHOILEE KHAN (February 23, 2011)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.