

A Good Day for Seppuku

Kate Braverman

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In Kate Braverman's *A Good Day for Seppuku*, there are few joyous moments or emotional breakthroughs. Characters keep to themselves, drift apart, or abandon each other, and though they may reunite, their meetings are generally troubled with past hurts and wounds, words unsaid, or wrong words said too often.

There is, however, a captivating undertone of dark humor to Braverman's stories, whether it comes through description, interior narrative, or sharply bandied dialogue.

The troubled teen daughter of former rock band mates is told that her posh Beverly Hills upbringing is enviable, and that "Moses would throw his tablets down to come to this party." A woman visiting her Idaho hometown notes how her dour mother looks "increasingly like Central Casting sent her for a farmwoman crowd shot." A husband whose wife hates his jazz collection has to keep the music locked away from her in his study, "like vials of pathogens."

Beyond this mordant edge, however, is a deeper, often melancholy detailing of lives and expressively haunting backdrops. A professor contemplates his ebbing career and marriage with almost obtuse detachment. A prim schoolteacher wistfully ponders getting a tattoo, then spends summer vacations searching for her daughter, lost among other prostitutes and addicts who elude the "longitudes and latitudes of their origin."

Settings range from jaded California to the surreal Southwest, or amid the bleak shadow of Pennsylvania's Allegheny Mountains, where "cars rust in backyards" and young men are damaged from stints in the army or prison. Place and background aren't always inescapable, however, as a somewhat prodigal woman discovers when she becomes prodigal again: leaving her grimly dysfunctional family behind is as simple as boarding a plane, ordering a scotch and going airborne, then watching the scarred landscape shrink while returning to a world of her own making.

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