



Bad Endings

Carleigh Baker

Anvil Press (Apr 21, 2017)

Softcover \$18.00 (168pp)

978-1-77214-076-7

Carleigh Baker's characters can't seem to hide their quirkiness—their oddities stick out, obvious to everyone but them. They're all uniquely inept and unqualified to deal with the situations they're in, whether it's marriage, a job, even just tying knots. The settings in which they find themselves are, if not always foreboding, at least drab enough to inspire a good case of depression; for an urban couple, both accountants bored with their marriage, even a canoeing trip near the Arctic Circle becomes stretches of mud, stunted trees and equally stunted, or absent, conversation until their desperation inspires an escape. Some make fragile connections. Some just keep running. "This is how life works," one of Baker's characters says, "Points for endurance." Memories don't bring much comfort either—another remarks, "Christmas was a lot creepier in the seventies."

Baker is a skillful, sensitive writer with an uncanny gift for subtle, dark humor and the ability to assume the viewpoint of her characters, whether a small child contemplating death; a father watching as his pregnant daughter's abusive marriage spirals out of control; a woman running from a "good" husband; a woman just released from the psych ward who takes a look at what's out there and decides she may not be ready after all; or people in relationships as superficial and fragile as a skiff of ice at the edge of a lake that the pale sun cannot seem to warm. There is no judgment or condemnation in these stories, but a tender, deep savoring of the quirks that make us human.

KRISTINE MORRIS (July/August 2017)

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