Clarion Review

General

Bandy's Restola
Kimberly White
Purple Couchworks
978-0-578-08830-3
Five Stars (out of Five)

According to Henry David Thoreau, most men lead lives of quiet desperation.

In that vein, Kimberly White expertly chronicles the quiet desperation of her Latina protagonist, Pattie Monk, in *Bandy's Restola*. On the cusp of womanhood, Pattie attempts to escape her economically depressed hometown of Wattlesburg, California. Her efforts are thwarted not only by her parents—who are grief-stricken over the death of Pattie's brother Steve—but also by the suffocating control of her Aunt Lula and by her own timidity. Still, some excitement comes to Bandy's Restola, the rest area where Pattie works, in the form of Duane Baty, a down-on-his-luck truck driver whose bleak circumstances match Pattie's.

Bandy's Restola marks the debut novel for this Californian whose other published works include two chapbooks and numerous poems. White has a talent for transforming the crushing weight of boredom and grief into a compelling tale. Physical descriptions of desolate Wattlesburg and Pattie's failed attempts to break free are repetitive yet engaging. White depicts the scenery, heat, and general poverty of the area so vividly that readers feel constricted right along with Pattie. They, too, suffer pangs of regret when the protagonist ends up back where she started.

The Monks are also stuck in their grief, and White creates a masterful portrait of a family disintegrating on the heels of a tragedy. The author is an accomplished poet, which means Pattie's dreams take the form of haunting, lyrical verse. This helps us to see Pattie's plight in the fragmented way that grieving or bored people often view the world. Although Steve is dead, he comes to life in Pattie's flashbacks and musings about him. Under a lesser writer's pen, the catatonic mother, domineering aunt, and drunk father could have become mere caricatures. Here, White endows these broken people with shreds of dignity.

The genius of *Bandy's Restola* is that White writes about little people—Pattie and

Duane, who want only to escape their little lives—and makes readers empathize with them. Pattie and Duane are nervous and awkward souls who never do anything notable. They simply fumble along, attempting to connect with each other, trying to make their own lives matter.

In a world where readers expect their characters to be brave, smart, and good-looking, Pattie and Duane are none of these. That makes their tale very readable—and very real.

Bandy's Restola is recommended for those who appreciate atmospheric, dystopian novels.

Jill Allen