Clarion Review

General

bang BANG
Lynn Hoffman
Kunati
978-1-60164-000-0
Five Stars (out of Five)

Paula Sherman is a 24-year-old waitress and would-be singer with a college degree hardly the type to be vandalizing windshields all over Philadelphia. But her life takes a turn after she witnesses the senseless random shooting of her good friend Tom. As if the trauma of Tom's death were not enough her statement to a TV news reporter that "it wasn't the gun" is taken out of context and co-opted by the gun rights lobby. Enraged by the use of her words and picture by a pro-gun US Senator and after seeing herself in an ad for gun rights in *Telescopic Sight Digest* she takes to the streets of her Center City Philly neighborhood—with a BB gun. Her first target is a Jeep Wagoneer chosen for the UGA (United Gun Association) decal on its rear window. Her ensuing spree is highlighted by a "Valentines Day Massacre" of at least forty UGA-stickered windshields in the city.

Paula's window-smashing behavior and its repercussions are the focus of Lynn Hoffman's second novel. Hoffman enlists his wit as well as his experience as a photographer food and wine expert and restaurant critic. He brings the reader along for a through-the-lens narration writing in immediate sensuous snapshot-style prose. While his characters eat drink make love and plot against gun violence Hoffman skewers the UGA/NRA and three of its representatives who take part in his story—appropriately named "the pig the ferret and the hawk."

Paula's neighbor Manny Cardoso a jaded local restaurant critic whose spare time consists of watching male prostitutes on the street from the roof of his apartment building witnesses Paula's first shooting and recognizes the trigger-woman. Indeed she has served him more than once at the Odetta restaurant. Manny "loved watching her body tighten and her spirit loosen" and is inspired by the shootings to seek out the affections of Connie a woman he has hitherto only dared to dream about. Meanwhile Paula morphs into a svelte urban warrior now

strapping on a pair of roller-skates for her handiwork. She allows herself to be courted by a young lawyer Daniel. Eventually she tells Daniel about the violence “how she started to love what she started out to hate” how good it feels to break all those windows. Meanwhile media coverage of the shootings is spawning copycat and spinoff crimes against guns lovers and their “stupid little bang-bangs” across the land. In one nicely-executed operation three nuns invade a Wal-Mart gun department with a cable-cutter garbage cans and containers of Alkazolve—a drain cleaner for plastic pipes—and put to waste every gun-barrel in the store.

Hoffman saves the most profound transformation for Paula. Her rampage has been a smashing success but with diminishing returns. “When I started fighting back” she tells Daniel “it really freed me. Now it seems childish … and scary too.” With the help of Daniel Manny and a growing anti-gun culture Paula transforms her rage into something more productive and meaningful.

Joe Taylor