

Brock Downsized

Robert Riche

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Unfortunately, many Americans can relate to being fired, let go, or “downsized” from a longtime job. Bill Brock, the protagonist of Robert Riche’s very funny *Brock Downsized*, suffers through this and many other problems that plague the graying-hair crowd: prostate trouble, a parent in ill health, concerns about his two adult children. What makes Brock appealing, however, is that he works through his issues in a way that is affecting, genuine, and humorous.

Bill Brock, relieved of his duties at a prosthetic manufacturing company, has seen his place in life upended. In search of a new role, he finds himself drawn into a marketing scheme for his artist wife’s paintings that goes wildly awry.

Riche knows writing and it shows. He has been a newspaper reporter and has written freelance travel and food articles for the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Town & Country*, *Forbes FYI*, and other publications. He also received a NEA grant along with several other awards. Like his character Bill Brock, Riche’s son is a sculptor and his wife an artist, which no doubt helps the details of the story ring true.

Riche portrays Brock as a likeable and realistic man in slightly unrealistic circumstances. Riche’s sense of humor permeates the book, but does not detract from the story’s emotional core. When Brock deals with his dying father, or expresses his hopes and fears for his children, it’s as affecting as any memoir: “I get Dad dressed, lifting his dead weight to slip on his underwear and pants over his diaper, then directing his arms into a shirt, and buttoning it. How much like this it must have been when I was an infant and he and my mother dressed me to go out.”

The first-person delivery puts readers right in Bill Brock’s shoes. Unfortunately, and somewhat surprisingly given the quality of the writing, there are grammatical and punctuation errors throughout the book. For example, “Pant’s seat,” “peak” instead of “peek,” and Doberman “Pincer” instead of “Pinscher,” along with other instances, all serve to jar and disengage the reader from Brock’s fictional world, if only for a moment.

Even so, *Brock Downsized* is a noteworthy achievement. Robert Riche takes readers on an enjoyable ride, one that allows readers to see the pain and fear, as well as the humor and hope, of life.

PETER DABBENE (January 3, 2013)

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