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Foreword Review SHORT STORIES

Carry Her Home

Caroline Bock
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In an early piece in this book of short, connected stories, Caroline Bock establishes a daughter's reverence for her father: "let me recall the days when I picked tomatoes beside my Pop, and ate one or two directly from the vine at his direction in his garden under the sun, and I was young, and I was a child loved."

Bock moves from a child who is loved to child who is sidelined by grief and stress when her mother suffers an aneurysm that leads to institutionalization, leaving behind her children and her floundering husband. In this autobiographical and imaginative book, Bock imbues her parents' story with compassion, rich detail, and cumulative power.

The forty-seven stories gather around the central narrative of Bock's parents, though the book also fast forwards to Bock's adult life and reverses to understand her grandparents. From a misguided and slapdash escape plan to a magical dance, an awkward family dinner to a notion store owned by a grandfather, Bock sketches rich landscapes and fully realized scenes.

While each story can stand on its own, it is when they accrue that the book's power is fully realized, giving it the depth and detail of a novel. Conscious of her own creative approach, Bock chose a medium that allows for the room to imagine her way into her parents' lives, thoughts, and emotions. Her father, Pop's, voice is powerful as he moves from courting to marrying to losing his wife.

The stories range from near prose poems and flash fiction to longer, more traditional short story forms. Bock uses the varying lengths to create a rhythm in the reading, with the short punch of "The Understanding" moving into the longer, cinematic "The Day After the Dance." Experimental and genre-bending, these stories bring together the introspection of memoir with the imaginative detail and potential of fiction.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (November/December 2018)

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