FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ LITERARY

Cataclysm Baby

Matt Bell
Mud Luscious Press (Apr 15, 2012)
Softcover $12.00 (184pp)
978-0-9830263-7-2

The twenty-six fathers narrating the alphabetized "chapters" of Matt Bell's *Cataclysm Baby* rope themselves to the reader, pulling him toward worlds where "fists of black hail fall from the cloudless sky and spatter the house, streak the skin of our walls, break windows above broken beds" or where parents "press our faces to the screen, put our ears to speakers making only soothing static … This is where they promised we'd see our daughter again, where they said she'd return beautiful and whole, not womb-thrashed and gene-short, not malnourished and depressed. Not like her parents, they promised."

Each of these worlds is splintering and never in quite the same way. The sons in "Greyson, Griffin, Guillermo" are a redheaded trio who impregnate all the women in their town with boys. "'This is how you start a dynasty,' one says over a family dinner … 'A kingdom,' says the next, then corrects himself. 'A franchise.' 'In a world that's dying,' says the third, 'isn't this all sort of beautiful?"

Bell has created a series of wombs inhabited by strange kinds of families that are also vaguely familiar. Here, babies are born with "hair on cheeks, on forehead, on lips and tongue" and children "put their hoofed hands upon the rungs of our fences." Here, parents teach their children to climb trees, explaining "how best to shimmy the twenty-story vines of this new jungle, this eruption of trunk and thorn and branch and thistle rising from where our concrete once strangled the earth."

Bell's narrators render their realities poetically: "Along our way, we see every kind of bird upon the ground, all heavy with forgotten flying and around them their mud-left eggs, as thin-walled as my wife's uterus, that tender space slung inside her unsteady body. Within it, within us both, sound always these trapped prayers, necessary to be loosed." And, without resistance—a father wakes "with my hand gone, divorced from my wrist, a tourniquet tightened around my stump and my mouth cottoned with morphine." It is a punishment from his children, his "three little furies, my three furious daughters," for his infidelity.

The images in *Cataclysm Baby* linger long after the last page—a quiet, respectful haunting of things that aren't quiet. And while aspects of these images, people, and places can be bewildering, Bell establishes an authority that encourages the reader to hang on for the wild ride. Matt Bell is also the author of *How They Were Found*.□
S. HOPE MILLS (Summer 2012)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author provided free copies of his/her book to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the author for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love and make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.