ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Fay
Larry Brown
Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill
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Fay Jones is not a typical heroine. She uses men and lets herself be used. She makes rash decisions and runs from the consequences. She smokes and drinks while she's pregnant and puts off seeing a doctor.

Yet somehow, the seventeen-year-old runaway from the backwoods of Mississippi manages to get readers on her side. As her saga unfolds along Mississippi Highway 5, hopes keep rising that this time she'll put a bit of common sense together with the bits of luck she stumbles upon to rise above her world of strip clubs, drug deals and crimes of passion. Fay hurtles through her life, following the course of events and circumstances rather than planning and making goals.

If she did, however, then Brown couldn't weave the vivid story that he has, though admittedly, its colors are on the dark side: an illegitimate pregnancy, child abuse, alcoholism, four murders. He takes his time setting up the story, but once the main characters are established—Fay and Sam, the old-enough-to-be-her-father cop who takes her off the streets and later becomes her lover—the pace accelerates.

The author's Southern setting for the myriad events of a few months' time are consistent and authentic on every front. Dialogue: Fay "ain't never" been to Tupelo. She "don't care neither" how a lover's lascivious brother is kept at bay. Food: biscuits, fried catfish, gumbo. Weather: hot and sticky.

Besides Fay and Sam, Brown has created a host of interesting, albeit sad, characters that fade in and out of their lives. Sam's wife Amy, who numbs her grief for their dead daughter with alcohol. Fay's family, revealed through flashbacks to the wretched childhood she's trying to escape. Reena, the stripper who seemingly takes Fay under her wing, but whose true motives are revealed later.

Even before Fay, Brown's credentials were swelling. The author of five other fiction works-one whose film rights are under option to Oscar-winning actor Billy Bob Thornton-and a memoir of his days as a firefighter in Oxford, Mississippi, he recently won a three-year Lila

Wallace-Reader’s Digest Writer’s Award.

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