ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Fear: Blood Curdling Short Stories
Annette Rickert
Xlibris
978-1-4500-6617-4
One Star (out of Five)

A scary story can be exhilarating. A rapidly beating heart, a shiver up the spine, and a burst of adrenaline are all great fun. There can be nothing better than curling up with a scary book on a cool dark night. A good horror story is only limited by the dark places in the writer's imagination. *Fear* is author Annette Rickert's attempt to share that darkness.

Fear contains four short stories that each involve an encounter with something monstrous. In the first story, "Déjà vu," the main character finds herself in a dreamscape with a pet cat that develops gruesome injuries and receives even more gruesome care. "Snack Anyone" involves a young woman who wakes to find that her mother is dead, having been impregnated by something with claws and pointy teeth that cut through her body when it was time to be born. "Buried Nightmares" deals with a small, filthy gnome with a taste for human flesh. The final story, "Fuzztails," is perhaps more amusing then scary; it centers on a herd of zombie rabbits.

The writing has several problems. Though the author has chosen to write primarily in the present tense, which is uncommon and can be distracting, she occasionally slips into the past tense. For example, she writes, "I stand there horror struck, not able to move. I couldn't comprehend what I was looking at." This change in tense is jarring and immediately takes the reader out of the story. A much larger problem with all of these stories is that none of them feel complete; all four are very brief and none of them contain a real plot. Each story explains a single event and reads like a sketch or an outline of a story waiting to be written.

Additionally, none of the stories seem original. The first one reads as though the author is recounting a bad dream. It does not follow any logical course, and anyone who has ever heard a friend describe a vivid dream will recognize that such stories are more interesting to the teller then to the listener. The other three are reminiscent of other pop culture stories. Aliens bursting out of their mothers' stomachs and fairy tale creatures hiding in children's bedrooms will be familiar to most readers—and anyone familiar with Monty Python will recognize the killer rabbit.

In the end, there isn't much to fear in this collection of short stories.

Catherine Thureson