FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Short Stories

In This Light: New and Selected Storie
Melanie Rae Thon
Graywolf Press
978-1-55597-585-2
(April 30, 2011)

Melanie Rae Thon, award-winning author and professor at the University of Utah, writes about the desolate, the despairing, and the lost in her new collection, *In This Light*. Some previously published and others new, these stories are about mothers in jail, children with no parents, and people who fail to save each other from the worst. Thon's characters rarely begin their stories with any kind of potential. She offers no false hope, no possibility of the usual redemption. Instead, she turns her laser gaze toward those among us who walk with the most invisibility, who suffer the most quietly; those whose stories don't make the pages of glossy magazines but instead earn attention in the crime column of local newspapers.

Which makes it seem odd that readers return to her stories again and again.

Perhaps it's the startlingly lovely lines that appear on every page, lines that shimmer with no obvious effort. But there they are, gleaming and sleek among the detritus of the characters' lives. Thon uses deceptively delicate language to describe utter brutality and the result is a resonating series of comparisons that bring suffering into stark relief.

Or maybe readers return for the compelling images that flip into view with cunning persistence and flawless timing: "Desperate in a blizzard last winter, two cousins with sharp knives stabbed Leo Henry's cow in the throat, split her gut with a hatchet and pulled her entrails out so that they could sleep curled up safe in the cave of her body." This image, both curious and revolting, returns to us a few times over the course of several different stories and evolves to encompass an odd definition of safety, even love. Under Thon's care, a repellent snapshot grows haunting.

A drunk girl who kills a drunk man with her car; a woman who feeds, shelters, and loves the homeless children of the town until she's sent to jail for stealing bikes; a volunteer ambulance driver who freezes in the face of death—these are the people who populate Thon's fiction. Her stories hang on very little plot and actions take a backseat to character. Readers of

literary fiction will appreciate Thon's careful attention to what these characters have to offer: lessons, warnings, and an odd kind of hope.

Andi Diehn