

Lot Boy

Greg Shemkovitz

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Eddie's everyman persona amplifies this entertaining tale of what happens at the juncture between the familiar and the unknown.

Edward Lanning, the twenty-seven-year-old son of a Ford dealership owner, is having a quarter-life crisis. In this wry novel on discontentment, a lot boy in Buffalo, New York—with few prospects and a chip on his shoulder—falls into fraud, reconnects with his high-school love, and avoids the inevitable outcome of his father's cancer. Greg Shemkovitz's profanity-laced debut, *Lot Boy*, sets the burden of family legacy in a gritty environment, revealing flawed characters with distinctive, unadorned liveliness.

Focused scenes in the dealership and service garage portray the never-ending winter of Eddie's life. Memories of growing up motherless, amid mechanics and a father known for his outsize bluster, are interspersed with Eddie's pursuit of a former girlfriend, as well as his effort to flee from local thugs after a botched attempt to sell car parts illegally. The plot alternates between story lines in well-timed ways; just when Eddie's unease threatens to turn relentless, the antics of fellow employees provide levity. A few moments turn questionable, including making a prosthetic leg the subject of macabre humor. Still, the fully realized locale and everyman persona add up to an entertaining tale of what happens at the juncture between holding on to the familiar and risking the unknown. When the writing sets aside banter for more serious recollections, Eddie's character gains necessary complexity.

Strong passages evoke the presence of Eddie's father. Though the elder Lanning is seldom physically present, his influence informs Eddie's outlook. Childhood recollections offer insight into the relationship between son and paterfamilias, which is marked as much by indifference and struggle as grudging acknowledgment. Eddie's inability to make the right gestures when he learns of his father's illness speaks to their complicated history and his own ambivalence. Though he doesn't quite redeem himself, that's largely the point: *Lot Boy* is an inventive, unsparing take on a mind-set so wrapped in real and imagined losses that it can't make room for others. Shemkovitz inhabits his main character by way of a thorough, crisp approach, offering a window on stagnation in an American city.

KAREN RIGBY (Fall 2015)

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