

Miss Entropia and the Adam Bomb

George Rabasa

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If fiction is moved forward by getting its characters into deeper and deeper trouble, then George Rabasa's latest novel is a speedy little car, following the misadventures of two lovable misfits. Thirteen-year-old Adam Webb falls in love with Miss Entropia, or Pia, when he hijacks the van that is taking the two off to Institute Loiseaux, a tony residential treatment center for disturbed youth. They are discovered a day later, dressed in shoplifted coats and hiding in a mall parking lot, where they've celebrated their new friendship with Adam's first hand job.

Three years later, Adam graduates from the Institute. Cured of his psychological tics—a personal relationship with the goddess Kali, for example—he returns home to witness the struggles of his family. It seems that the so-called sane have plenty of their own problems. Pining for Pia, who never made it to Loiseaux, he now manages to track her down. She's on the run, the prime pyromaniac suspect in her family's house fire. Adam spirits her up to his bedroom where he keeps her for three weeks until his family insists on meeting the secret guest.

What Adam learned from Loiseaux is control, and control is what he steadily applies, to keep Pia safe and close to him. His control, and his obsession with Pia-as-goddess, lead them into increasingly tight corners until, socked in by a northern Minnesota blizzard, there is nowhere else to go.

Rabasa is twice the winner of the Minnesota Book Award—for his novel *Floating Kingdom* and his collection of short stories, *Glass Houses*.

This novel is not flawless. The drama between other characters feels unfinished, and the initial framing device (a letter from Adam's former therapist) seems unnecessary. In the final section of the book, Rabasa re-summarizes, as if he is foundering in the same deep snow as his characters. However, his depiction of Adam's maturation is fascinating. Threaded throughout are questions worth considering about the relative nature of balance and the necessary envelope of privacy each person needs to live.

Pia, erratic and vulnerable though she is, is the North Star in this story, true to her own understanding of how things are, and the light by which others can take direction. And the reader may well be enchanted by the young Adam, the wise and loopy kid who says, pretending to channel Pia, "Some odd people are not meant to fit into the world but to make the world fit us. We are sane only when we embrace our weirdness...When we refuse to be straightened out, the world bends by small degrees in our direction."

TERESA SCOLLON (March / April 2011)

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