



People Want to Live

Farah Ali

McSweeney's Publishing (Oct 26, 2021)

Hardcover \$24.00

978-1-952119-29-3

Set in Karachi, the fourteen short stories of Farah Ali's stunning and soulful *People Want to Live* are tales of bumpy lives steeped in poverty, bleakness, violence, and despair.

The devastations within interior lives are highlighted in fluid prose; each story has the emotional heft of a novel. In "The Effect of Heat on Poor People," a marriage disintegrates during the worst heat wave in forty years; hope arrives, but is fleeting. In "Heroes," a mother holds onto the fact of her son's drug addiction after his violent death; it is a singular truth amid sorrowful platitudes. Elsewhere, the city's pervasive violence is the backdrop for a man's modest but unattainable ambition to be the driver of a bulletproof bus.

Quieter stories center on people's inability to weather or cushion moments of emotional turmoil. When a son visits his aging parents, the toll of a past episode of his father's abandonment is laid bare. Mental health teeters in the balance as a mother blames herself for her own self-harming depression and neglect of her daughters. And a carer struggles to hold onto his equanimity while empathy contracts in a mental institution. In the happy ending of "Beautiful," an orphan cobbles together a future and a semblance of family life with a rat-catcher.

There are stories told through a peremptory US visa officer, and using the wry jargon of tourist brochures, but even these refuse to exoticize Karachi, which is revealed instead through throwaway details, as of paan-stained corners, as well as within the conversational cadences of friends and married couples. In the short stories of *People Want to Live*, countries and ideologies may demarcate boundaries, but the heart knows none.

ELAINE CHIEW (September / October 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.