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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ SHORT STORIES

People with Holes

Heather Fowler
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In Heather Fowler's second short fiction collection, *People With Holes*, the nexus of each story is a hole of some sort, whether literal or figurative. Mixing erotica and magical realism in several of the stories, Fowler explores the shadowed niches of the human heart in prose both lyrical and funny. Some of the characters metamorphose into decidedly odd beings.

All the stories are more than adequately written, but a few do stand out. The title story has the effect of peeking in on a support group (something like AA) for people who have holes— actual ones—in various places on their bodies. Fowler seems to be reflecting on the comfort a person can derive from talking to others about similar circumstances. In "Ex-Boyfriend's Head," the author presents a wish fulfillment-revenge fantasy in which a woman cuts off her ex's head and carries it with her. "How to Rescue A Drowning Man" lists the steps for this activity in humor-soaked prose, using a style reminiscent of the Dummies book series, with saltier descriptions. A woman who's had a string of bad relationships with men stops in at an antique store in "Madagascar Hissing-Dress." Nina is looking for a gun to defend herself against her latest abusive ex, but shop owner Noah offers a very different defense method—a wearable one that lives and attacks anyone wanting to hurt her.
The similarity between this "defense system" and the Madagascar hissing cockroach is cleverly employed.

Fowler's ability to make a reader believe all the strange things that happen in these stories is deft and precise. Some of the living beings are not human; and while they're certainly used as metaphors, each is also presented with behaviors specific to their species. The power—and joy—of magical realism is that the combination of "real" world and fantasy is never explained, and the informed reader knows that that's how this genre "works." One might say, "stuff just happens," and thus describe this entire collection, but only in a superficial manner. Fowler's prose is by turns rowdy, affectionate, erotic, absurd, and glittering, with images both awesome and awful.

Readers who admire any of the finest writers in the genre (Isabel Allende, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Franz Kafka, Toni Morrison, and Salman Rushdie) should enjoy the flights of fancy within this book, and also be able to confront its darker journeys.
J. G. STINSON (June 19, 2012)

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