

The Green Lantern: and Other Stories

Ariel Smart

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The recurring theme in this collection of 11 short stories is the ability of the parent-child relationship to define its participants and permeate their lives in ways both powerful and subtle. The stories are mostly brief glimpses into a central character's life, yet the influence of the parent or child (in one case, the "child" is a beloved dog) is felt deeply.

Five of the stories are set in the 1960s and feature the occupants of the Green Lantern motel in the southeastern desert of California, a region whose economy centers on agriculture thanks to the largesse of Colorado River irrigation projects. In this harsh, lonely land, widowed motel owner Frank Harper's two main concerns seem to be keeping his ten units rented and his young daughter, Delia, out of harm's way. Her curiosity, boredom and loneliness draw Delia beyond her father's boundaries. Her adventures, while the stuff of everyday life, serve to open her eyes to the perils and peculiarities of the adult world.

Some inconsistencies in the Green Lantern stories detract from the narrative. Particularly frustrating is the author's failure to explain the reason behind Frank Harper's intense dislike of dogs, an assertion he makes in nearly every story. However, first-time author Smart crafts her stories and prose competently. Her characters are well drawn and recognizable; some are sympathetic, others chilling. The stories work on both an intellectual and an emotional level and provide good reading.

SHARON FLESHER (January / February 1999)

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