FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

General

The Hunger Bone: Rock & Roll Stories
Debra Marquart
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Marquart's prose is so spare, direct, and free of posturing that one wonders at first just what attraction rock music holds for her. As these twenty-one tales play out, it becomes apparent that she is not so much fascinated by the music as she is by the curious states of suspended animation and solitude her characters occupy offstage. It's important to note that Marquart doesn't write here about loud, garish stadium rock, crowds of thousands, or Jumbotron-size egos. Her characters are working-stiff musicians who play the clubs and biker bars of small-town America and nourish (or abandon) their dreams in crowded, rickety vans and reeking motel rooms.

A one-time touring musician herself, Marquart understands the fragile community a band develops on the road and the intricate emotional alliances that form and dissolve among its members. It is generally within this context that she explores a particular character's state of mind for her stories.

In "Three Mile Limit," Marquart imbues her main character—the "chick singer"—with an almost unbearable sense of yearning for the recently married and still philandering guitar player. The strength, however, of Marquart's characterization is that she keeps the yearning low-key and "cool." There are no histrionics, no explosions of tempers, and no frantic embraces. Yet the longing the woman endures and the awareness of the chances she's lost are palpable: "In that moment alone in the van, I wanted to take a scalpel to the last two years of my life, wanted to watch the unimportant days and weeks fall into curls at my feet. I wanted to keep the good parts, splice them together without interruption, arrange them so that they added up differently."

Through a different guitar player in the title story, Marquart examines the soul-crushing absurdities life piles on these artists. Forced to play '50s music to get a dance booking, the guitarist encounters a hustler who talks him into selling tombstones while on the road, the premise being that no matter where he goes there will be dead people. The situation would be

funny were it not for the fact that the guitarist minutely feels the grief of each potential customer. Moreover, he knows that in forsaking his own music he, too, is dying in a way: “Late at night after a gig, he’d think about last year and this year and next year, and he’d feel the hunger bone, floating foreign in his chest like a sponge left behind by a surgical team? That’s when he’d get out of bed and start to work on his songs. The empty feeling never went away completely, but writing the songs helped.”

Edward Morris