FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ HUMOR FICTION

The Vices

Lawrence Douglas
Other Press (August 2011)
Softcover $15.95 (352pp)
978-1-59051-415-3

In this novel, the central character vanishes. Whether by suicide or accident, Oliver Vice exists as no more than a memory and source of rumination for the nameless narrator. The narrator—a novelist and professor at Harkness College, where he was a colleague of Oliver Vice—examines and chronicles Oliver's life and history. Readers learn that Oliver's father left his mother, his twin brother, and him when they were young. Francizka Nagy is an over-bearing and wildly funny Hungarian mom who, in later times, entertains a mildly Oedipal relationship with Oliver's twin, Bartholomew, a gigantic man obsessed by Winston Churchill. The narrator and his wife become close to Oliver and his family through dinner parties and Christmases spent together. The Vices' extensive art collection is the initial draw; however, upon Oliver's death, the narrator searches for deeper truths about the Vice family. Why does Francizka seem to be lying about her past? If Oliver is not Jewish, why does he have the Tay-Sachs gene? Why did Oliver's birth father leave his family? And just what exactly does Manny Morgen, the family lawyer, know about the Vices' past?

Douglas Lawrence—the James J. Grosfeld Professor of Law, Jurisprudence, and Social Thought at Amherst College, and author of the acclaimed novel The Catastrophist—creates a suspenseful story in The Vices. Readers will be intrigued not only by the fantastic, eccentric Oliver Vice and his lovers, but also by the mysterious narrator. Since he exists at its periphery, readers only see and sense him through his experiences with Oliver. In fact, his only storyline revolves around the demise of his marriage due to his wife's relationship with Oliver. The dual irony of the narrator's invisibility becomes apparent before long: although Oliver Vice is the character who physically vanishes from this novel, the nameless narrator is the character who is actually absent. Eventually, the narrator voices Oliver's thoughts on "a narrator who turns out to be the invention of the main character" because "the only way the [main] character can tell his story is through an act of radical alienation, projecting his life onto an imaginary storyteller." Ha!

This brilliant, funny book will appeal to lovers of Jewish fiction and those who hunger to unravel mysteries.
BRACHA GOYKADOSH (August 30, 2011)

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