

These People Are Us

George Singleton

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The author has brought to the page quirky characters and settings that could only exist in real life in the American South. His main characters are neither poor nor rich and fall somewhere between having a high school and college education, although Singleton informs readers that his narrators are college-educated and lean toward liberal politics. Then there are the fictional situations, some of which verge on the absurd, proof that the author has an active imagination and a puckish personality. For instance, in “The Ruptures and Limits of Absence,” the narrator returns to his South Carolina hometown to help the townspeople feign the aftermath of a fake tornado.

The fourteen stories that form this book first appeared in literary journals such as *Georgia Review*, *Glimmer Train*, and *New Stories from the South—The Year’s Best—1999*, and in *Playboy*. The author demonstrates a knack for humor, placing facetious or sarcastic remarks in the mouths of his characters and introducing scenes and odd Southerners that are naturals in the inexact science of comedy. In “Crawl Space,” a four-foot-tall plumber shows up to re-attach the drainpipe beneath the narrator’s home.

Biting humor propels every story, as in “Normal,” when the narrator tells a five-foot-two-inch-tall woman he’s just met, “You look like you might’ve played some basketball in your time, Jane. Or maybe done some runway modeling over in Paris.” The humor works, though halfway through the book the sarcasm may wear on readers.

The stories seem to involve the same male narrator who uses phrases such as “What I’m saying is,” and “It just came to me, fast,” and refers to either his first wife, second wife, or possible girlfriend. An extra layer of concentration will be required to differentiate among narrators and not imagine a composite of them.

“Rentals” stands apart in the collection in that it focuses on a sincere friendship between two men who are neighbors—Kilo and a blind man named Chuck, who is searching for a suitable activity that will land him in the *Guinness Book of World Records*. He enlists the help of his younger neighbor, and winds up playing billiards.

Readers who have a propensity for stories about the South and for eccentric and unpredictable characters will appreciate this collection; Singleton’s sarcastic wit book is best admired intermittently.

DOROTHY GOEPEL (November / December 2001)

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