ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Women and Other Animals
Bonnie Jo Campbell
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During a typical day, Campbell's characters are killed by circus tigers, transform themselves into gorillas and excavate their amputated limbs from burial plots. Clearly, this is not your typical short story collection.

In "The Perfect Lawn," Kevin stalks cheerleader Madeline Martin, daughter of an alcoholic mother with a habit of setting the house on fire. While Madeline concentrates on leaving her chaotic home for the refuge of the University of Michigan, Kevin begins to care for the Martin's neglected lawn and to protect Madeline from herself. Kevin feels "an overwhelming desire to take care of Madeline, to get ashtrays for her, to check every hour whether or not her couch was on fire." Even after Madeline escapes to Ann Arbor, Kevin returns to the Martin's house to share his grief with Madeline amid the empty vodka bottles, dirty paper cups and cigarette smoke and ash.

"Sleeping Sickness," another story in the collection, features twelve-year-old Regina who lives with Margie, her alcoholic mother and a succession of no-good men. When John Blain drifts into their lives, he seems like just another loser, a drunk like Margie, with an inappropriate desire for Regina. Things go well for a time, as John Blain repairs their ramshackle home and keeps his desires in check. He eventually, however, dies of exposure after passing out in the snow where Regina finds him.

Campbell is a confident writer, composing her stories meticulously. Her writing is fluid and capable; thirteen of the sixteen stories were previously published in literary journals. It is easy to imagine the impact of one of these eccentric stories in a journal; as a collection, however, the combined effect could be somewhat depressing for the low spirited.

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