

Wonderland

Samuel Ligon

Stephen Knezovich, Illustrator

Lost Horse Press (Apr 11, 2016)

Softcover \$20.00 (92pp)

978-0-9908193-9-4

Ligon's poignant compilation mirrors fundamental truths about human desire and defeat.

"Something broke in me for good, some brittle thing I didn't know was there," writes Samuel Ligon in his new collection, *Wonderland*, "and then it just kept breaking." Ligon's bold and twisted wit, coupled with artist Stephen Knezovich's vintage collages, makes these thirteen fantastical short stories impossible to ignore.

The book mesmerizes from the start, when a young man falls for a bearded lady and subsequently shaves her signature facial hair. Tender love continues to come with violence throughout the book, leaving the reader to wonder, as the writer does in "Pie & Whiskey," "How many times can a heart be broken?"

Ligon counts the ways. A baker and his wife squabble over how to cure her cold until he questions "how many Vicodins it would take, baked in a pie or a cobbler, to end her suffering for good." Two young children, when chastised by a voyeuristic goat, learn there are right and wrong ways to love. In another story, adolescent twins grieve the loss of their mother's bosom, full of "streams of whiskey" and "melted butter," when they turn fourteen.

Ligon's playful absurdity provides the ideal landscape to examine the messiness of human sexuality. One man begs God for his deceitful neighbor's "quick and painless death," while another writes an "unsolicited" confessional about a young woman who is his "student first, then my peer...my lover. My grandmother. My pet. My piss angel." As this strange tale suggests, fantasy and indulgence are essential threads in Ligon's storytelling.

The final story is based on the illustrious nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence." Ligon describes the infamous blackbird after he pecked off the maid's nose, writing that he "pulled away from the others and circled on extended wings, drifting slowly, silently, down, down, down."

While Ligon's poignant compilation portrays outrageous characters who descend into similar despair, it mirrors fundamental truths about human desire and defeat. Anyone who is open to exploring the dichotomy of love's gentle and gritty nature will find this collection intoxicating.

JACQUELYN LAZO (Summer 2016)

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