FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Yellowrocket
Todd Boss
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Todd Boss's first collection of poems, *Yellowrocket*, takes its title from a wildflower that "reeked" when pulled from the soil. The poems also wish to, and do, hold as tightly as plants to the plain earth, and to heritage, to being human. "Ruin had ways," the first poem ends. All the poems celebrate the primal kind of ruin, the tempting kind, that makes one want to buy a mess of a farm, pick window glass shards and bent nails from the muck, pull barb-wire out that has grown into the birches, and mostly, to arrive at these fine, spare poems. They grow from the complicated soil of family—a grandfather who plays pinochle with his pals, who calls 911 the day his wife dies, a mother who's still mourning her own mother's death, fights between husband and wife—all the weather of relationship, as well as the turbulence outdoors. The six sections of Boss's book move gradually outward from the initial investment in a few acres of ruined soil, to small studies of the concrete objects of daily life—a dog, a son, a chimney, icicles, a mechanical toy. "Kind of nice to know that things/ like dogs, grow fond and want/ to be had, to be used, to be played," Boss writes. It would be tempting to call the poems charming—they are that—but they also admit a wisp of pain, of loss: a richness. For example, this "charming" line could stand as a coda to the poems in this collection: "Don't love//dress funny/ sometimes?/ And shouldn't/ it be sin// to wear so/ carelessly/ such finery?/ It fills me// up with/sympathy!"

The poems are careful with love and equally careful with language. There is a graceful discipline here, a quiet voice that knows what's at stake in the few words, the often two-stress lines. Rhyme happens within and at the end of lines, its music, and that of carefully chosen repetition, doing its work almost invisibly, for example in "My Joy Doubled":

to drive my daughter
through the jeweled
morning light
this morning:

joy to sigh,
”What a lovely morning!”
and see the glimmer
in her eye
in the rear-view mirror
as our light went green

One is tempted to use also the word “refreshing” to describe Todd Boss’s book. Nothing is wasted in the lines, nothing is strained, yet the poems smolder. They make us aware of our lives.

Todd Boss received his MFA from the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and lives with his wife and two children in Saint Paul, Minnesota. Until recently he was director of external affairs at the Playwright’s Center in Minneapolis, where he is now a consultant on special projects.