



In The Box Called Pleasure

By Kim Addonizio

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Fiction. By turns graphic, funny, and moving, these urban tales present characters who are teetering on the edge. Indifferent or absent lovers, drinking and smoking too much, loneliness, paranoia, a desire that is always fresh. In spite of the facts, rage, and obsession -- this is the macabre landscape of these unrestrained stories.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Eroticism fraught with danger, violence and a fragile redemptive possibility infuses poet Addonizio's (The Philosopher's Club) collection of short fiction. In 22 stories, slim hopes for sexual satisfaction and true love are overshadowed by the troubled pasts and messy entanglements that plague the characters' lives. Women seem to bear the brunt of their lovers' (and their own) addictions, loneliness, rage and obsessions, and even while many of these female characters are defined by an undeniable "survivor" instinct, they also exhibit a naïveté and a desperate hope that sex will save them. Sexpot bartender Angel in "The Fall of Saigon" betrays seething, lovelorn thief Dennis with a guy who rides a Harley, never knowing how close she has come to provoking a homicide. Similarly, Fran, the narrator of three linked tales, prefers Sasha's rough, sadistic lovemaking to Loren's gentle ways, and winds up losing both men. In "The Gift," a woman finds a realistic dildo on the street and takes it home. She falls asleep and awakens transformed into a man feeling the raging lust of her new appendage, but she quickly discovers that enhanced power comes with unbearable vulnerability. Other tales feature two men dying of AIDS, a young mother unable to cope with her daughter, and myriad couplings involving liquor, hotel rooms and cruelty. While the characters' problems are varied (alcoholism, sexual obsessions and abuse, drug addiction, masochism, loneliness) their voices are disconcertingly similar. Addonizio's phrasing is provocative, and her settings range from seedy bars to surreal psychological escapes. She aptly susses her characters' paradoxical sexualities and passions: "I realize I've lived by definitions; now there aren't any and it's impossible to function." In the end, however, their erotic rewards seem barely worth the struggle. (Oct.)

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Review

The women in award-winning poet Kim Addonizio's debut story collection are all pining for sex. Some yearn for s/m, bondage and discipline, or other, less choreographed acts of erotic menace. Others long for men who have proven to be unmemorable, even execrable lays. [...] Addonizio braves Mary Gaitskill's stomping ground, sketching portraits of troubled women who mistake a semblance of sexual chemistry for love and pay a dear price for their error in judgment. [...] In "Have You Seen Me?," one of the more poignant and thoughtful pieces, a divorced community college teacher gets drunk with one of her male students, only to be cruelly rebuffed after making a pass at him. "Scores" is the second of three interconnecting stories about Fran, a rape and incest survivor involved in an obsessive s/m affair with her boyfriend's best friend. When her lover breaks off their liaison, he hurts Fran further by tattling to her live-in boyfriend, leaving her with nothing but the apartment [...] Addonizio raises the stakes with more experimental works, like "The Gift," [...] and "A Brief History of Condoms," [...] Addonizio is a talented writer, sure to go places [...] -- *The Village Voice*, Kera Bolonik, November 10 - 16, 1999

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