

Scott Whitaker Reviews Richard Peabody's *Blue Suburban Skies*

Richard Peabody's newest short story collection, *Blue Suburban Skies*, is a tight collection of satire, masculine existential crises, and strong females popping with sexual energy. Not a bad way to spend an afternoon, eh? Peabody whisks up winks amid sometimes violent acts uncovered among suburbanites, who for better or for worse, represent most of what's left of the middle class portrayed and skewered in Peabody's breezy read.

Blue Suburban Skies is entertaining as it is serious, and kept reminding me of movies from the 1970s and 1980s. Keep in mind, friends, my boys are eight and five and movies in my life tend to be of the Disney and Big Budget Family variety, and the imagery Peabody uses, and the tragic and comic circumstances the characters find themselves meandering through, reminded me of those days when studio pictures reflected real life rather than pallets for CGI and big concepts. Entertainment can reflect our innermost selves, and when it does we tend to call it art.

The suburban landscapes tie the stories together, but Peabody isn't interested in so much at poking fun of the suburbs, but rather uncovering the faulty cracks in the people who have been born, raised, and work there. And the stories aren't so much about the suburbs, anyway, they are merely the landscape, as are the commodities the characters consume. Perhaps Anchor Steam beer, and Grateful Dead tracks fix the story in time, perhaps they allow the stories to transcend time, but they are, in some cases, objects of desire. Objects of circumstance.

Many of the stories collected here are stories about writers, or artists, and these characters aren't so much above the masses, as they are on the outskirts, just as incapable of living with their spouses and communicating with the real world as so called regular people who are afraid of showing their fear. Peabody's characters don't just sit around and ponder aesthetics, they save people's lives in the most unheroic ways, or blunder around another person's heart, and even protest conservative politics.

