*We Were Lucky with the Rain,*by Susan Buttenwieser rev. by Taylor Croft

Four Way Books

Susan Buttenwieser, the author of *We Were Lucky with the Rain,*is a long-time teacher of writing. She has taught in New York Publishing Schools and facilitated writing workshops for maximum-security women for nine years. She has held workshops at homeless shelters for LGBTQ youth, pretrial detention centers, and many other facilities. She has dedicated her life to writing and works to give others a modem of being heard through their writing. (previous publication of short stories)

*We Were Lucky with the Rain*is a collection of short stories based around hopeful families despite broken homes. There are twelve short stories within the collection, and none are alike. To name a few; A family is preparing for their father to go to prison, a motel housekeeper trying to balance work while having to raise his younger sister, a young girl going on a fishing trip with her father and his boss, a child of a divorce having to watch his parents move on with their new families while leaving him in limbo, and a compilation of townsfolk all living their lives while reports of two escaped convicts potentially roaming the town.

One of the main elements this collection employs is a variety of interesting points of view of characters. Every protagonist is dealing with an issue, both internally and externally. In “The Last Supper,” readers find a family preparing for their father to go to prison. Readers see through the eyes of the oldest son, who is only nine, as each person in the family works through the transition. This character is impactful because he is emotionally the strongest character in the story. We see him helping his mother, without a complaint, care for his younger brother, who does not understand the situation. Readers see his selflessness on the last night his father is home, “Jack knows that tonight his father will choose *Finding Nemo…*Tommy likes it and Jack wants his dad to enjoy this eventing*,* he decides not to say anything.” He has now become “the man of the house,” so to speak. Another interesting perspective is in the story “This Small, Good Feeling,” where a child of divorce goes with his father to London for Christmas. He is forced to hang out with his father’s girlfriend’s children, two aggressive boys, and follow them the entire night of the visit. The only reason he goes with his father is that his mother insists on needing some time alone to take care of her new baby. This story is placed in an impactful point of view because readers see through a child’s eyes that it feels like he has no place in either home he is supposed to belong to. This concept is displayed beautifully when Buttenwieser writes:

He wants to point it out of Sophie, his father’s new home. Travis thought they would spend Christmas together, just the two of them, in their hotel room, but now he’s not so sure. They’ll fly home on Boxing Day and when they land at Logan, his father will be rushing to catch a connecting flight for another city and more meetings…The streets will be dark and empty when they drive home to his mother in her sweatpants, consumed with taking care of the baby.

This particular scene is impactful because Travis feels closer to a stranger than he does with his own family. He is changed by this one moment, and while he knows he has to go back to his limbo-like life, he is happy to be held and to be warm.

The dynamic between characters is also a vital element employed in this collection. Whether it be a quiet relationship like in “Nights at the Marco Polo” or a defined one like in “Distant Edge of the Horizon,” every character in this collection is a moving part of both the tension and relaxation for the protagonist. In “Nights at the Marco Polo,” readers watch as a housekeeper works to turnover rooms at a sleazy motel in South Carolina. The relationships between the characters in this story are distant but defined. The motel manager, Gerri, is a reasonable but strong-willed woman who used to teach girls sports. Within the story, flashbacks illustrate Gerri’s character while she instructs Walter, the protagonist, on how to clean rooms and handle many situations involved with the motel. The dynamic between Gerri and Walter is seen mostly in the background or behind the story’s scenes. Another relationship that is important in this story is Walter’s connection he has with his youngest sister, Mallory. Walter is seen having some sympathy for Mallory, “She grew so much this past summer that she’s now the tallest girl in the entire sixth grade…Mallory has become even too weird for her weird best friend, who ignores her.” His empathy for his younger sister becomes an increasing tension as he gets a call from her school about a semi-violent altercation she had with another girl who has been bullying her. He’s unable to pick her up due to him needed to finish his tacks at work.

“Distant Edge of the Horizon” is about a young girl being taken with her father on a fishing trip with his boss. This story holds strong character dynamics between the daughter and her father. April, the protagonist, and her father are working through the death of their mother/wife. The father is shown multiple times leaning on April for support; one of the most significant examples is that this fishing trip is just a way for his boss to let him go. The two have a secret language, and April is seen picking up on many times. Understanding someone’s body language is an impactful way to illustrate their bond. This story also has moments of beautiful setting description, one being of the lake they go fishing at, “they’ve been out since early morning, when the water was smothered with fog so thick, you could lie on top of it. As they motored past barely visible fishing boats and canoes, the fog kept retreating, moving to some place they never quite reached, always on the distant edge of the horizon.” Moments like these allow the reader time to sit back and admire the visuals being given to them.

The structure is mainly explored through flashbacks and flashforwards within the stories. These provide world-building and character-defining moments, but one story’s structure largely contributes to its impact. The structure in “Swan Lake” revolves around multiple perspectives from a town that has just learned that two escaped convicts from a maximum-security prison might be hiding in the woods within the town. This structure is significant because, through the townsfolk’s many eyes, readers see each family’s minor tensions while the major tension of these escaped convicts looms over each section.

The whole collection utilizes impact in a quiet yet resonating way. These stories’ impact does not hit the readers with high energy but instead leaves the readers contemplating and wanting more for the stories’ protagonists. This collection of short stories holds defined family-driven tensions built on marvelous characters. I would recommend this book to anyone who enjoys reading about families or quietly composed stories. Truly was an enjoyable read and a fantastic take on how a broken family can always find a way to be hopeful.