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What I Can Tell You

Brian Fleming

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“If you think short stories are light entertainment, prepare yourself for a shock... You will find yourself gripped.” – The Times of London

“Brian Fleming’s first collection of stories impresses... The alienation he describes has in its telling a closeness of experience that's faintly disturbing.” – Time Out

"Exhilarating, chilling, always vividly written, these stories explore those dangerous borders of experience where self-fulfillment and self-destruction are only a narrow space apart." – Barry Unsworth (Sacred Hunger)

"These stories are at once so sunny and in touch with actual life, and so unblinking about the horrid residue and omnipresence of mischance." – Diane Johnson (Le Divorce)

Mirroring the arc of life from youth to old age, Brian Fleming's riveting first collection of short stories (originally published under the title |Curves and Bends and Cars That Won't Come Fast") explores the stark vagaries of life and the dangerous border between longing and loss, where self-fulfillment and self-destruction are only a narrow space apart. As his characters chase after happiness, however fleeting, they discover that the truth remains slippery, that morality is arbitrary and that redemption only comes at a cost.

In "Playing", three children on the threshold of adulthood explore their sexuality with disturbing consequences. "Curves and Bends and Cars That Won't Come Fast," tells the story of a young boy who plays chicken by darting in front of oncoming cars, then seeks new ways to recreate the the thrill as he grows older, culminating in a visceral finale. Meanwhile, the young woman in "Something To Hide Away" finds that the sexual encounters that once empowered and freed her now leave her longing for something that will change her life – whether for good or bad.

The three stories of the break up of romance that follow, with their atmosphere of lost chances, are gripping and leave the reader open to the stark, "In You Blood," about a new father confronted by the law after a drunken brawl and the aching "If You Came To Watch Me Die" about an aged musician who manages to find poetry and love through the blur of his alcoholism.

The fierceness of the writing is matched by the legal battle of the black man in "Down In Miami Forty Years Ago," who's faced with a murder he committed four decades before that ruptures his faith in God and the redemption he thought he'd found. His personal struggles are matched by the brilliant physicist of the transcendent title story, "What I Can Tell You," who narrates the loss of his mind while fighting to retain his human dignity.

Together these stories tell of people only one misstep away from any one of us, driven by a desire to break free from the constraints of life, who find themselves movingly and often painfully unable to handle the freedom they thought was theirs.

Brian Fleming graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His first book was published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 1999. We wrote, directed and produced the short film "The Last Time I Had Sex," based on one

of his stories.

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