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TITLE INFORMATION

DRIVING IN BUDAPEST

Stories of loss and love, hope and despair...about life.

Gary V. Brill

CreateSpace (232 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

Brill's promising debut collection of short stories enjoyably navigates the streets and the heart of the Hungarian capital.

All the central characters of these stories seek direction, including a widower who's traveled to Budapest to learn to play jazz, a librarian who's become disconnected from the world, and a secret policeman who struggles to comprehend postcommunist Hungary. The ever-present chaos of the capital's traffic encircles them as they attempt to carve routes through their own lives. The opening, first-person story, "Taxi!," is written with such honest fluidity that readers may be fooled into mistaking it for autobiography. In it, San Franciscan Allan Simmons is on a mission to rediscover life after the death of his spouse. He hopes to achieve this by learning to play jazz piano but finds difficulty integrating into a city where he speaks little of the language and struggles to bridge the cultural gap. By chance, he meets Tibor, a taxi driver and fellow jazz aficionado, which allows him to experience the true embrace of Hungarian hospitality. It's by far the standout story of an emotionally insightful, rewarding collection. In the elegantly written, sad, and charming tale "Getting Lost," Maria, a lonely librarian, is unnerved by the sudden arrival of a mysterious gentleman who courts her attention. "Bullies," about Lszlo Hajdu, an ice-cold former member of the secret police, recalls communist Hungary's atmosphere of intimidation and suspicion, and considers how such ideologies linger on in the present. The author captures the vibrant hum of the city and revels in playing the flâneur, keenly observing the populated streets with brio: "I walked down streets I had never been on before...through pretty little squares with children playing...past a music school and listened to the sound of violins filling the air." Overall, the collection is stylistically reminiscent of Paul Auster's short stories, and it's a must for anyone interested in Budapest.

Moving, descriptive, and seductive urban tales.

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