



Sweet Nothing

Richard Lange

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In these gripping and intense stories, Richard Lange returns to the form that first landed him on the literary map.

These are edge-of-your-seat tales: A prison guard must protect an inmate being tried for heinous crimes. A father and son set out to rescue a young couple trapped during a wildfire. An ex-con trying to make good as a security guard stumbles onto a burglary plot. A young father must submit to blackmail to protect the fragile life he's built.

Sweet Nothing Details

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Author : Richard Lange

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From Reader Review Sweet Nothing for online ebook

Pamela says

As I was telling my dad: "Most short stories I encounter are really precious. These ones are gritty and real."

Don says

All of the characters in Lange's bleak, tender stories are losers, men with questionable pasts and limited futures and yet the author's gift is making them appear sympathetic as they try to negotiate the here and now in their own clumsy ways. There are no wasted words, no throwaways, all of the stories are worth reading, but I found 'Sweet Nothing', the title story about a former drug addict trying to find his way back to a more balanced world the most touching.

yix says

I semi-liked Sweet Nothing, with its brutal reality and gutty characters, stuck in the middle between right and wrong like we really are, not like those fictitious, flawless protagonists. The writing was all right, I suppose, lyrical sometimes and staccato at others but nothing remarkably beautiful.

These short stories, however, did not strike me as anything special. I got bored during some of them; they were all too similar and it's almost like you read one and you've read them all. I guess another issue I had with this book is simply that the endings didn't hit me. Nor did the middle, or beginnings. It's more or less just a general reflection on life in the slums of L.A., offering a realistic portrayal of those who haven't done much good in their lives.

I wasn't ecstatic over this book, but it appears I am in the minority. So give it a shot, but if you're interested in short stories, there's plenty of better ones out there.

2 stars | 9 Mar. 2015

tee says

It's moments like this I am painfully aware of my mortality. I'm relatively young, I am not terminally ill so therefore I have a good chance of being alive for when this book comes out next year. BUT WHAT IF I DIE IN A FREAK ACCIDENT BEFORE THEN. An agoraphobia relapse is looking mighty tempting.

Liz Barnsley says

One of my New Year Resolutions this year was to return to my once avid love of short stories - this seemed like a good place to begin and I'd say that was a brilliant choice on my part. Hey modesty ain't my thing.

Every story to be found in this collection is, without exception, absolutely compelling and beautifully written...the book travelled around with me and every time there was coffee there was a story. They all have a dark side, a deliciously enticing yet grounded prose that draws you into the lives of a bunch of eclectic people and situations and gives you a snapshot of a particular moment that changes them.

I loved them all, would not give anything away by describing each one in detail, but have to give an honourable mention to "Sweet Nothing" and "Must Come Down" my favourites of the bunch. There is a whole lot of heart here, quite a bit of soul and they will give you pause for thought on many occasions as some of the characters you meet make decisions you want to yell at them for. I DID yell at them sometimes. It will suck you in.

Terrific stuff. Really captivating. Lets have some more please.

Happy Reading Folks!

Serena says

stars

In compliance with FTC guidelines, I have won this book through the Goodreads Giveaways.

Must Come Down
Baby Killer
the Wolf of Bordeaux
the 100-to-1 Club
Gather Darkness
Instinctive Drowning Response
Apocrypha
After All
Sweet Nothing
To Ashes

My Rating System:

* couldn't finish, ** wouldn't recommend, *** would recommend, **** would read again, ***** have read again.

Genevieve says

Wear your darkest aviator shades. Richard Lange's collection of short stories in Sweet Nothing Stories are set under the glare of the California sun, mostly in the concrete jungle of L.A. and surrounding areas.

There's something about L.A. Must be the cognitive dissonance of smog and heat and the Pacific Ocean and the bullet-riddled ghetto and the golden hills. I went to school in NYC and yet nothing terrified me more than that summer I lived and worked in L.A. The neon-lit freeways, the traffic, the morass of cars and the specter of road rage. There's something about L.A. I never liked the city on principle. The strip mall feel of it and the car culture have always been a little off-putting. The beautiful people, everywhere, heavily contoured and buffed. Too much lip liner and mascara and sculpted eyebrows and tight yoga pants. L.A. is harder and

grittier in a way than New York City ever was. But I respected that. I grew up in SoCal, so L.A. was always orbiting my cultural imagination.

Sweet Nothings is a fantastic distillation of L.A. in all its cultural shorthand. Lange has a wonderful ear for L.A.'s special brand of urban vernacular, especially the thought patterns of its denizens—a motley cast of characters from an ex-con security guard and a recovering drug addict, to a grandmother who witnessed a drive-by shooting and a prison guard. The settings are mostly in L.A. but not all; there are a few stories scattered in the surrounding desert (“To Ashes”) or in a different time (“The Wolf of Bordeaux”).

Lange drew me in—drew me in hard—with this short story collection. There's something daring about Lange's unfussy portrayals, too. You won't find gimmicks or tricks here, just real storytelling. Real writing. Lange sounds like he's writing from the gutter, from the ground littered with bullet casings and cigarette butts; he writes like he's been there. So many authors strain to be gritty in order to be edgy in their narrative style, to affect a certain tone and voice, but you can always see the fakery; the words and stories feel too cosseted, seem too much like a facade. *Sweet Nothings* is old-fashioned and honest, but not safe—it's far from safe. Lange writes with precision, and he writes with a tenderness for his characters but also with a fury, too, that feels authentic. There's a veracity there that feels almost *Frontline*.

In “Apocrypha,” Lange captures the raw feelings of invincibility and invisibility convincingly:

“I go back and stand next to my chair. I cross my arms over my chest and stare up at the clock on the wall. In prison, there's a way of being, of making yourself invisible while still holding down your place. I feel like I'm on the yard again or in line for chow. You walk out that gate, but you're never free. What your time has taught you is a chain that hobbles you for the rest of your days.”

“We don't say anything to each other as I pass by, I don't even look at him, but our souls scrape like ships' hulls, and I shudder from stem to stern.”

In the title story, Lange conveys the poignancy of a meaculpa epiphany and gets into the bones of the character's regret and remorse:

“My wife? Okay, we married too young and hung on too long. We were casually cruel to each other, and torment became a game for us. But that's nothing unusual. You see it on TV every day. I can't blame the kids either, although when they came along I had to divide what love I had in me into smaller portions, and it sounds selfish, but you know who got shorted? Me. [...]”

“So what, then, spun me out, sent me sliding across the track and into the wall? Maybe I'm not meant to know. Maybe if all of us were suddenly able to peer into our hearts and see all the wildness there, the wanting, the fire and black smoke, we'd forget how to fake it, and the whole rotten world would jerk to a halt. There's something to be said for the truth, sure, but the truth is, it's lies that keep us going.”

“But he lived on, and so did I. Jesus fuck, it's a mystery, all of it. Smoke a cigarette, change the channel, stare into space. Then go to sleep, go to work, and come home again, over and over and over, until all your questions are answered or you forget you ever wondered.”

In the “Ashes,” a character regards the sad aftermath of a brush fire and the death of migrants crossing the border:

“The fire burned hot here. Not even the blackened bones of the trees are still standing. It’s as if a bomb exploded, leaving only scorched sand and bare rock. Brewer concentrates on this, the destruction, the smoke still billowing in the distance. He’ll not pause to lament the cruelty of man. Better to keep running with that as a given.”

Sweet Nothings is far from cookie-cutter crime pulp or hard-boiled noir. In many ways, it’s much more nuanced. Echoes of Raymond Carver abound here; it has the same quiet humanity. Stories like these about the urban underclass could devolve into cynical portraits meant to shock and disarm, but Lange steers his short stories with real, visceral empathy.

[Disclaimer: I received this book from the publisher via NetGalley for an honest and candid review.]

Carole says

In Richard Lange’s new book *Sweet Nothing*, the reader gets a taste of the less-than-glamorous side of life in Los Angeles, California. This book’s marketed as a collection of thriller short stories, but I don’t think it’s the right label. Lange’s previous book—*Angel Baby*—was a fast-paced novel of that genre. True, you’ll fly through these tension-filled stories, but not because they are suspenseful thrillers. This collection brings together raw, compelling narratives I’d peg as literary fiction.

Read full review here: <https://grandbarda.wordpress.com/2015...>

Melki says

Yes, we're all con men at heart.

This is a fantastic collection of short stories about the members of our society who find it hard to fit in, hard to pay the rent and hard to forget the past. There are killers and reluctant snitches, junkies and ex-junkies, criminals and former criminals who struggle with life among the civilians. Here is a gambler who finally wins a bet, but loses a good thing in the process. Here is a man bored to death by his newly domesticated existence. There's even a post-apocalyptic search for buried treasure. The last story, about the human consequences of a fast-moving wildfire, is unforgettable.

I can't say enough wonderful things about this book. Highly recommended and sure to be one of the best reads of 2015.

Sarah says

Very talented author. I cannot wait to read his other books!

Rachel says

So I just posted a status update two hours ago of feeling conflicted for not liking the few stories that didn't stick to Richard Lange's strength (being: grifters, gamblers, convicts in contemporary LA). I didn't want to go to 19th century France or post-apocalypse with him. I wanted to keep living in his quietly tragic world of garden variety petty criminals.

And then, the final two stories: "Sweet Nothing" and "To Ashes". Both snuck up on me and completely broke my heart. Both made me cry, of the *suddenly you're growing a lump in your throat & tears are rolling down your cheek before you realize it* variety. Both made me feel like an asshole for being critical of Lange when there are so few authors anymore who can stick that knife in my guts and twist so effectively. And with him, the best part is...it's not even obvious that he's doing that.

I'm sure you've heard that saying that most of us are just a few decisions away from living on the street ("living on the street" of course being figurative language for all sorts of destitution, from a life of incurable discontent to being targeted for death out of revenge to actual homelessness). This concept is exactly what Richard Lange appears to live to write about. Lives made destitute by a decision or two, or just plain dumb luck, and then what comes next. He does this with the greatest compassion.

Read *Sweet Nothing*. Be amazed by the deep sadness he brings up in you with his deceptively simple style and antiheroes fallen hard from grace. Put on some Tom Waits and reflect. And when you're done, go read *Angel Baby* too.

Highlights: "Apocrypha," "The 100-to-1 Club," "Sweet Nothing," "To Ashes," "Baby Killer".

Allan says

Richard Lange isn't a big name, but is an author whose books I will always be on the look out for, having enjoyed in particular his 'Dead Boys' short story collection, and debut novel, 'This Wicked World', each inhabiting the lower reaches of LA life and society in their narratives.

This short story collection, with a couple of exceptions, finds Lange on familiar ground, telling the stories of a variety of characters, some more sympathetic than others. From a son in law, who finds that his wife's father isn't the man he thought he was, to a grandmother struggling to keep her granddaughter out of the clutches of local gang members, from a character struggling with gambling addiction to one getting back on his feet after losing all to his addiction to crack, the majority of stories are well crafted, and I as a reader was invested in finding out the fate of those that they featured.

There were a couple of the stories that I didn't like, including one that I took to be post apocalyptic in nature, but all in all, I found this collection easily read and enjoyable. I'll continue to look out for new Lange releases in future.

Christine says

I will confess, I gave up after only a few of the stories. I think Lange is a good writer and has great pacing and all the technical skills. He's just hanging around in subject matter I'm not a fan of.

David says

I received a free advance copy of this book as part of a GoodReads First Reads giveaway. This short story collection takes the reader into the gritty side of L.A. Much is pointed out today of the shrinking middle class, and the 1%. This collection focuses on the other 1%, bringing you into their lives, understanding their struggles and, yes, makes you want to root for their success amid all their struggles. If you think you have it bad, there are others who have it worse, and by drawing us into their lives, Richard Lange illustrates to us, of the vanishing middle class, that we are much more alike to these one-per enters, than the other. I'll definitely put Richard Lange on my list of authors to follow, and his prior works will go on my Want to Read shelf.

Scott Cumming says

I don't always have the time or the inclination to review the books that I've read. Sometimes it comes and goes by the time I get to adding my rating. I take the time to point this out as this will be my second review of a Richard Lange book. (And I almost chickened out of it.)

Having previously read Lange's novel Angel Baby and having left with the feeling that things were wrapped up a little too neatly I decided to see if I enjoyed his stories better. I could see from the novel that he was a good writer, but maybe hadn't quite cracked novel writing yet. Well, I think the assessment was probably pretty close to the truth.

Like any collection there was a variance in the quality and this was certainly a book of two halves. The first couple of stories are alright, but Baby Killer is very transparent plot-wise. The Wolf of Bordeaux unexpectedly transports us from modern day L.A. to 19th century France and it's hardly a pleasant shock.

The 100 to 1 Club is the first story that really took my interest and it perhaps made the others dull a little in its presence. It's an almost Bukowski-esque tale of a chronic gambler taking a woman on a first date to a race course. From there the quality seems to stay fairly consistent with stories about drug addicts and general douchiness.

Apocrypha is the story that is probably closest to a straight crime story. It tells the tale of an ex-con security guard who is unwittingly dragged into a heist on his work place. This was the type of story I expected going into this one, but Lange surpassed my expectations with a lot of the work on show.

There's another slight blip with After All, which feels like a poor relation to Cormac McCarthy's The Road. It's perhaps an easy comparison, but Lange's story just feels too vague and unfulfilling. Initially I thought the story was some sort of Wild West thing.

The highlight comes second from last with the title story, Sweet Nothing, imbued with everyday sadness and some amazing passages. A drug addict goes about reforming his life and the events of the story are heart breaking and inspiring in equal measure. It's subtle, but effecting.

By halfway I was at the point where I wouldn't read Lange again, but by the end I was ready for whatever he has for us next.
