

Review from Herstmonceux Book Group

Black Bread White Beer by Niven Govinden

It seems rare to find brutally honest and soul-baring depictions of relationships from a male viewpoint. This short but intensely detailed novel picks over the coping skills in a modern relationship when life does not go according to their well-laid plans. Dealing with the loss of hopes for themselves and their parents is hard for a professional couple to come to terms with. When so much emphasis has been placed on the physical requirements needed for conception, it seems doubly hard to deal with the fall-out. The methods that the couple choose reflect their personalities. Burying a plastic box in the garden, ripping out a toilet for Claud; getting drunk, phoning a friend and eating for Amal. Difficulties are exacerbated by Claud not wanting to tell their in-laws that a baby has been lost. Ultimately acceptance and moving on can happen but it takes patience and understanding, awareness of each other's feelings and shows there is a real strength in this relationship.

With much of the setting being based in Sussex at Claud's parents, we felt a sense of kinship due to living in the same area. Distractingly for some, the route taken to drive from London to Lewes bore no resemblance to reality and rendered a sense of incredulity and annoyance to other facets. That said, people, although finding the couple slow to warm to, did ultimately empathise with these professionals on a planned journey and the intense pressure they put themselves under. Likewise the expectations of the potential grandparents were very believable. The book covers the perspective and the seemingly incessant need for control of a modern middle-class couple with dissimilar backgrounds. It touched on the futility of religion in their lives but was mainly about their desire for a family when being a couple is not enough and the biological clock is ticking. The feelings described were real and understandable. The search for a closer level of communication is so easy to relate to, whatever the age and state of a partnership. Some group members found this a difficult book, raising hard reminders of a similar circumstance. For others, it was an open insight into the male psyche at a critical time in a relationship. We are still confused by the choice of title with inventive ideas provoking much discussion.

Thank you Niven and to Fiction Uncovered for the great opportunity to share this book and its insider view of a marriage.