



Edugyan's skills are exhibited full-force in *Half-Blood Blues*, which moves back and forth in time from the late 1930s in Germany to the early 1990s in Poland and includes pivotal stops in Paris. A complex chronicle of the intersecting lives of three jazz musicians, the novel examines issues of race, politics, art, survival, redemption and betrayal.

Here's narrator Sidney Griffiths, describing a Nazi era-outing in Berlin with his pianist friend Paul: "I caught a sudden glimpse of how every [woman] on the trolley seen him: handsome, athletic ... those eyes bluer than Greek silk. The perfect Aryan man. And he was Jewish." Then there's Louis Armstrong, who makes a cameo appearance in the novel wearing a Star of David.

Riffing on her themes with a dazzling command of jazz culture and language, Edugyan details the circumstances surrounding the disappearance in Paris of Hieronymus Falk, a gifted Afro-German trumpet player. Readers learn that the fabled solidarity of jazz musicians is often rocked by rivalries that are not apparent onstage or in recordings.

Regarding *Half-Blood Blues*, Edugyan has said the book is the first work she crafted while listening to music. To be sure, the novel hits shimmering notes of originality, authenticity and brilliance.

TELL ANNA SHE'S SAFE

BRENDA MISSEN

Inanna Publications

REVIEWED BY LISA TREMBLAY

In this Canadian tale, Brenda Missen blends

fact and fiction to write the story of two women: Lucy, who disappears, and Ellen, a friend and colleague who tries to find her. The search brings Ellen into contact with Lucy's ex-con boyfriend and with a police officer, who begins to hit on her. The similarities between the two men are striking: They're both possessive and they both frighten her. One big difference is that one of them is linked to Lucy's disappearance and the other is not.

Stories of women who befriend convicted killers are, sadly, not uncommon. Many of us wonder what possesses women to develop relationships with men who are doing time for killing women. Missen tries to make sense of this in her story.

The convict to whom Lucy writes in prison had taken the risk of informing on another inmate. Lucy respected his courage and, in making contact, opened a door to a relationship that she thought would help her deal with her own emotional struggles and anxiety attacks. The man seemed to be honest about the way he had "accidentally" killed a prostitute. He also gave her the kind of focused attention she was missing in her life. If she'd been schooled in detecting abuse patterns, Lucy might have heeded the red flags when he became jealous and controlling. But she doesn't.

One aspect of the story that seems unrealistic is Missen's account of Lucy's therapist and her lesbian partner, who double date with Lucy and her ex-con boyfriend. Stranger still is the role Missen gives to the therapist's partner, who assists the ex-con in abducting Lucy while she is

trying to escape from him. Consider yourself forewarned. Otherwise, this mystery is an interesting read.

THE BIG DREAM

REBECCA ROSENBLUM

Biblioasis

REVIEW BY NIRANJANA IYER

Long ago, I worked as a banker. Of course I planned to milk my experiences for a novel. Everyone but my mother is glad that the manuscript is dead, and, in any case, there would be no point now that I've discovered Rebecca Rosenblum's *The Big Dream*, which unravels the cat's cradle, bridging the work and personal lives of cubicle dwellers with enviable precision. If you've ever been an ill-fitting cog in a giant wheel, much of your joy in this book will stem from the discovery that Rosenblum has it exactly right.

Set in the Toronto office of a lifestyle magazine publisher, the interlinked stories in this collection showcase financial officers, cafeteria workers, marketing executives and customer service representatives all struggling to remember what's real and important, even as their work lives corrupt their judgment. Professionalism has come to signify a deliberate absence of emotion; inevitably concomitant are the amplification of trivialities and the forcible suppression of primal preoccupations.

Rosenblum is masterful at identifying the mutations in thinking that result from buying in to a consumer culture that emphasizes marketing and spin. The characters in her book often define themselves by singularities (usually banal), deliberately whittling away at any hints of personality that might mark them as less-than-corporate material.

"Don't do anything that could draw attention. Your goal should be to be anonymously indispensable (like a photocopier that never jams)," says the unnamed narrator in "How to Keep Your Day Job." But the corollary of such suppression is a disconnection with reality; we lose our sense of what's natural. In "Complimentary Yoga," an incompetent, prickly worker concocts a romantic relationship with his supervisor, even as he's getting fired.

Each of these stories pulsates with an awareness of the globalized world in which the characters interact, albeit reluctantly. In