

Wilderness House Literary Review 10/4

A Collection of Friends by Thomas Sheehan
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Review by Nina R. Alonso

A Collection of Friends by Thomas Sheehan brings the reader into his life with intense physicality, the rough texture of early and later years. The story that opens the collection, *Dumpmaster's Boy*, brings us the sandwich he's carrying to his grandfather, "the great sandwich in a line of great sandwiches... wrapped in brown paper and tied up in white string by my Grandmother, Mary Brennan Igoe."

We feel the characters, hear the noises the stove makes, watch this grandmother's eyes, and the world is palpable.

His detailing of the dump is both precise and gorgeous: "Old wet blankets falling apart. Horses in there someplace, perhaps pieces of them... Cluttered newspapers...ink blobbing in clumps, words going downhill like sundown. Squashes rotted to the last seed of hope." Sheehan's writing is often poetic, pulling the last bit from whatever he's seen and felt.

In these days of irony and abstraction, it is a relief to read someone who is connected to life, however disturbing, painful and surprising. In *The Great God Shove*, a bullied boy finds a way, despite his small size and years, to go on the attack, and the writing's neither indulgent nor syrupy.

Later stories explore characters, a chronic drunk, a fellow student. In *Parkie, Tanker, Tiger of Tobruk* it's a soldier friend back from the war. "That afternoon I realized Parkie had come home to die," seen and felt in a deeply essential way. "Our differences were obvious, though we did not speak of them. The sands of North Africa had clutched at him and almost taken him. Off a mountain in Korea I had come with my feet nearly frozen." These are fine stories.



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