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TITLE INFORMATION

A CALIFORNIA STORY

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Adelaide Books LLC (222 pp.)

ISBN: 978-1-950437-83-2; October 20, 2019

BOOK REVIEW

A young man contemplates West Coast life and his technology career in Silicon Valley while family and interpersonal tensions simmer.

This novel by an author, essayist, travel photographer, and former computer engineer follows India-born Ved, a disillusioned, soft-skilled marketing manager. Ved works at the multinational computer networking behemoth Omnicon. At 36, considered “late middle age in Silicon Valley terms,” he has become restless and anxious to venture elsewhere. His three-year tenure with the tech firm is already stale. Mostly unattached throughout his 15 years in America, he begins dating Liz from an online matchmaking site. She’s a spiritually conscious woman who is the polar opposite of Sasha, a 28-year-old Russian escort who satisfies Ved’s carnal needs until real romance can break through the monotony of singledom. More dates with Liz open up their personalities further and explore their differing opinions on contentious issues, alongside an amusingly silly intimate moment involving a scene-stealing moth. Still, Ved’s own internal concerns over death, aging, and whether or not he will grow old alone make the narrative relatable. Meanwhile, he contemplates his future while reuniting with his graduation buddies from India who perceive his life to be more exciting and provocative than it really is, callously calling him “too much of a California liberal, with too many un-Indian tastes and manners.”

After several chapters of interoffice melodrama that threaten to dampen the novel’s pace, Arora (*The Lottery of Birth*, 2017) ratchets up the intensity with a plot twist involving a visit from Ved’s parents. Obsessed with their son’s health and happiness, they share updates on the state of modern India and impart their wisdom and opinions on American culture, which contort and challenge Ved’s ever-eroding resolve about remaining in the United States. A vicious hate crime assault happens while Ved and his parents venture out together. This strikes terror in their hearts and his parents draw their own conclusions as Ved’s overall impression of his safety in California is called into question. Light on plot but engrossing nevertheless, the book keeps the momentum flowing as Ved tries to enjoy working for a sinking company he doesn’t particularly support or like while processing the abundant emotions linked to suffering an attack for being an Indian immigrant in America. Arora’s narrative is structurally sound and capably written with a protagonist who is endearing. Ved will give pop fiction readers someone to cheer for as he navigates the precarious world of online dating, job dissatisfaction, and, perhaps most socially significant and politically relevant, the rampant discrimination and violent racism coursing through the streets of America. Indian culture is knowledgeably and effectively personified through Ved’s character as the story explores the nature of the immigrant journey in the United States: how it shapes lives and can make or break both personal and professional experiences.

A cleverly written tale with a social conscience featuring themes of family, inclusiveness, racial divides, and the theatrics of love.

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