

Booklist

Advanced Review – Uncorrected Proof

Issue: May 15, 2016

The Good Lieutenant.

Terrell, Whitney (Author)

Jun 2016. 288 p. Farrar, hardcover, \$26. (9780374164737).

Terrell (*The King of Kings County*, 2005) imaginatively assesses the cost of an IED explosion by telling the stories of the concussed backwards from the moment of the blast. The ranking officer in the Humvee is Lieutenant Emma Fowler, whose professional duties—and personal loyalties—have led her platoon to the fields behind a suspicious house deep in Iraqi backcountry in search of Sergeant Beale, who disappeared in a moment of questionable judgment. Attached to the gearshift are steel shackles, a souvenir of a more innocent moment in Fowler’s career; manacled beneath the dashboard is Pulowski, Fowler’s signal officer and sometime lover who, like Fowler, left Kansas to escape family dysfunction. Reveling in earthy banter and gritty details, Terrell offers grim realism. But much of the novel’s war-story bravado is undone by its reverse chronology, which cleverly destabilizes expectations of closure, sidelining questions about the who, what, when of Fowler’s failed raid to raise more difficult questions about the meaning of it all. The result is a sad and memorable tale of thwarted optimism, incomplete intimacy, and collateral damage.

— *Brendan Driscoll*