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READING GUIDE:

Sydney Warner Brooman's *The Pump*

Dear readers,

I'm so delighted you've decided to brave the swamp waters of *The Pump*. This book of thirteen interconnected stories is my attempt at answering a question I've had since I left the small Southern Ontario town I grew up in: How do we separate where we grew up from who we are? Even now, five years after I began writing the book, I still don't have the answer. I think it's okay for that question to be an ongoing exploration, undertaken by both writer and reader. You won't find clear-cut lessons in *The Pump*. There are characters who do both wonderful and terrible things; choices are presented with no outcomes that prevent harm; and relationships are confusing and complicated. Truth in *The Pump* is as murky as the town's water supply—as opaque as it often is in real life.

The central narratives of *The Pump* are structured around the idea that one traumatic moment can impact future moments and people and entire families and even entire populations. I've always been interested in the ways the private traumas of my childhood intersected with the collective traumas that affected my entire town. There are a handful of characters in *The Pump* who we see grow over several years, and each of their narratives deals with the impact of private and collective traumas: domestic violence, poverty, parental death, pollution, political gaslighting, addiction, the breakdown of relationships, and public deaths. These traumas are not separate linear narratives, but rather are parts of one large, connected web that contributes to one decision every character considers: to leave The Pump and conform to its misery, or to leave and change, if change is even possible.

If you grew up in a small town, you know that the decision to leave or stay is incredibly subjective. One can leave if they have the money, resources, and support to do so, and one can stay if they conform to a heteronormative way of moving through the world—or can safely continue to live in their home or community without fear of strife, abuse, or even death. *The Pump* explores the ways in which poverty and queerness add layers to small-town isolation and trauma. The queer characters in the book have positive, negative, and complicated associations to their families. They're in beautiful and harmful and complicated romantic relationships. They choose to leave, or they choose to stay. As a bisexual, non-binary writer, I did not attempt to create a glowing representation of queerness; I created people—messy, morally-ambiguous, traumatized people—a lot of whom happened to be queer.

My sincere hope is that at some point while reading this book, something will resonate for you: a character who shares your identity or experiences. A description of loss, or PTSD, or the intricacies of small-town Southern Ontario living. A humorous, tender, or emotional moments between lovers, siblings, or parents and their children. I wrote *The Pump* to make space for people like me, who haven't seen their own stories in the canon, and didn't think they were worth telling. It would be my dream for someone to set down this book feeling like the world needs their story too. Because it really, truly does.

With love,
Sydney Warner Brooman