Dark Blue Suit: And Other Stories

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Description

"Just remember, Buddy," said my father, 'you got family, you got friends. Back home in Cebu, but 'specially here, where you got nothin'." So begins this beguiling strut into true riches, recounted in twelve powerful stories by award-winning novelist Peter Bacho. Set in Seattle from the 1950s to the present, Dark Blue Suit depicts the lives of two groups: Filipino immigrant pioneers, the Manong generation who arrived on the Pacific Coast during the 1920s and 1930s, and their American-born children. Although narrated as fiction, the stories - their landmarks, activities, settings, and events - are grounded in historical fact.

The book opens with the annual spring dispatch, by the Seattle-based Filipino union, of thousands of Filipino workers to the Alaska salmon canneries. We meet characters who reappear throughout the stories: Vince, the tough but charming union foreman and "big shot" father to Buddy, our American-born narrator; Chris, the battle-scarred union president targeted by McCarthyism; Rico, the spirited young king of the neighborhood who will fall victim to Vietnam; Stephanie, the beautiful mestiza who marries up; and many others who age and change in ironic counterpoint to persistent themes of loyalty, fierce ethnic pride, and a willingness to struggle against hostile forces in society. There are wry twists of humor and surprising turns of plot; a long-lost love is renewed; a long-hidden family secret is revealed.

We encounter the inevitable aging and passing of the Manong generation, but we sense as well the arrival of its vision. Babies are born. The migrant fisheries worker gets a nine-to-five job, and his children go to college. The conclusion builds to a quiet power that is essentially elegiac; an era closes, but the voices of the older generation are shouldered by the younger, to keep the history to retell the stories, and to pay homage.

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Comments

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Dark Blue suit is an interesting collection of short stories about the Filipino-American experience. As are many books written concerning immigrants and 1st/1.5/2nd generation people, it is oftentimes sad. However, one of the reasons why I probably enjoyed this collection so much is that it was one of the only books about Filipinos that I could order, much less find at a local library or bookstore. From this collection, one may see many different faces and experiences of immigrants (whether Filipino-

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