Book Review on Paul Rawlin's *No Lie Like Love: Stories*  

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One of the most impressive feats of Paul Rawlins’s story collection *No Lie Like Love* is the way it makes drab working-class towns feel so alluring. The observations of the down-on-their-luck narrators in so many of the stories give these towns and their inhabitants an almost exotic sheen. In one story, the attendees of a neighborhood barbecue are described as men who “fold their hands around longnecked bottles of beer like so many wise Jews at Iowa’s own wailing wall made up of the peeling white fence that keeps the yard from breaking outside itself.” It’s details such as these that valorize the neglected communities that the stories focus on.

Rawlins, a BYU alum, won the Flannery O’Connor Award for this collection—and it’s easy to see why. His unassuming prose style highlights the human element of the stories, creating characters that feel like they could live just down the street. Daily,
mundane struggles take on an appropriate sense of significance. In “Still Life with Father,” for example, the story’s middle-aged narrator describes the stagnant state of his daily existence in the house he shares with his elderly father. He ruminates on missed romantic opportunities, on the finer points of laying concrete, on foods his father will not eat. The story ends, not with a stunning epiphany or change in fortune, but with a simple description of the narrator coming home from work at night to find his father on the front porch: “If he’s awake, he’ll look up and lift a hand to wave, watch me as I head up the walk toward him, his only son come home.”

In this story, like so many others in the collection, what ends up holding together the crumbling lives of the underdog narrators is their ability to find some comfort in their often frustrating relationships with those who are close to them. From these relationships comes a tough, realistic optimism about the future. As the narrator of another story puts it, “when I find two nickels to rub together, stand back from the heat of molten metal and the flash of a rising star.”