Review of Such Good Work

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In 2013, Jonas Anderson is an insecure creative writing instructor whose students view him skeptically, but no more skeptically than Jonas views himself. As a recovering drug addict, Jonas battles his past life daily: his desire for pills bedevils him always. A chronic failure at teaching and writing, Jonas stumbles through a series of jobs and relationships, eventually moving from the United States to Sweden, where he encounters a refugee crisis, an Afghan teenager named Aziz, and, ultimately, his purpose.

Through first-person narration and a style that is deceptively simple and straightforward, Lichtman creates a character we hope will succeed and with whom we can sympathize (“My life, like all lives, regularly presented me with pain”).

With a wry humor that sometimes harkens back to the wacky drug ravings of Hunter S. Thompson, the dialogue is mostly sharp and witty, though in the latter part of the book, it loses some of its edge. Yet the story’s momentum and sincerity never flag. Using an episodic, sometimes staccato structure in this debut novel, Lichtman takes Jonas from self-obsessed confusion to certain determination to do and be good.

VERDICT: Recommended for anyone interested in contemporary issues of politics and humanity.

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