

between appearance and reality grow progressively unclear. The characters are hidden behind multiple masks; even in the throes of torrid, passionate sex they reveal nothing of their true nature. Part of Harsh's strategy is to worm his way into Kathleen's confidence. Over burgers at a get-acquainted date, the middle-class Korean-American concocts a Hmong childhood in Xieng Khouang, Laos, recalling seeing his brother blown up by a mine. Later, when Colby is trying to become more intimate with Kathleen, she claims to be from Xieng Khouang as well, a missionary child who lost a friend to a land mine. At that point, I started flashing back to the scene in Bergman's *Persona* in which the two women's faces merge.

Inevitably, Gregg Harsh's efforts begin to bear fruit, and soon he has gathered enough union cards to force a vote by the rank and file. Stillman Colby has made no inroads whatsoever, and appears as much at a loss in his union busting efforts as he is at understanding the nontraditional corporate culture of FOW. After enlisting Colby's aid, union CEO Harvey Lathrop had receded into the background. But something is afoot. He has ordered a complete remodeling of the union headquarters, and the work is kept hidden from all prying eyes. He has embraced a corporate mentality and had a makeover as well. When he reappears to the assembled employees, backlit by blinding sunlight, his head has been shaven, his rose-tinted glasses have turned mirrored sunglasses, and his rumpled tweed jacket has been replaced by sharply tailored Italian suit. I could see him as the remade fascistic Floyd Pinkerton in *The Wall* crossing his arms in the sign of double hammers and shouting "Get him up against the wall"!

But the FOW family doesn't buy this new Daddy. Tangled and tortured alliances unravel and reform in bizarre permutations, leading to a violent and somewhat satisfying, albeit somewhat perplexing climax.

Reading *Labor Day* was a very satisfying experience for me. The promise of its twisted premise was not only fulfilled; it greatly exceeded my expectations of a nicely wrought story and delivered lots of intellectual stimulation. When the characters in *Labor Day* are not busy misleading and/or seducing each other, they get involved in deep philosophical discussions about labor relations, industrialization, and human nature, all of which I found interesting and thought-provoking. The frighteningly corrupting power of pride, money and power are all displayed in this universal tale. Without hesitation, I can say I look forward to reading more of Kemske's Corporate Nightmare Series.

Editor's Note: Kemske's Corporate Nightmare series includes *Lifetime Employment*, wherein a company that hires for life has an official policy that the only way to get ahead is murder; *Human Resources*, a vampire novel; *Labor Day*, with its emphasis on psychological horror; and *The Virtual Boss*, a techno horror gem in which computer software takes over an office environment.

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Labor Party: A Review of Floyd Kemske's *Labor Day*

by John Schultze

Kemske, Floyd. *Labor Day*. North Haven, CT: Catbird Press, 2000. 203 p.

This fourth novel in Kemske's series of "corporate nightmares" is based on a premise so delightfully twisted I had to suppress wicked laughter as I read the book: it is psychological dark fantasy concerned with the efforts of a labor union to prevent, of all things, the unionization of its office staff.

Harvey Lathrop, president of the Federated Office Workers, has learned that a hitherto unknown union, the International Brotherhood of Labor, has infiltrated the staff of FOW's national headquarters, and the thought fills him with terror. He is so terrified, in fact, that he brings his greatest professional enemy, union buster Stillman Colby, out of retirement to root out IBOL and prevent its organizing his staff. The former antagonists, now allies, initially are drawn with a few similarities. Colby's conservative, corporate button-down mentality is evident in his obsessive devotion to the fine tailoring of his suit and insistence on driving just the right luxury sedan to maintain the illusion of his power. He is the consummate corporate whore, dressed to ply his trade. But there can be no whore without a whoremonger, in this case Union boss Lathrop, who dresses—and behaves—informally, sitting on his cluttered desk to chat with Colby, who sits stiffly in his chair.

Colby's sartorial anality is further shocked by the dress of FOW's vice president for operations, known throughout the book simply as Kathleen. To Colby, with whom she is detailed to work as his assistant, she might as well be a space alien:

She wore another of her brightly colored denim overalls. This pair had horizontal stripes of primary colors. She wore a black tee shirt, which was just visible under a faded silk jacket advertising Macon Bacon, which Colby assumed was a special type of pork. Her earrings appeared to be plastic spools, with the bright red sewing thread still on them.

The enemy to be rooted out by the unlikely alliance of Colby and Kathleen is the mysterious IBOL, its logo being (surprise!) a staring eyeball. Little does anyone suspect that this international union consists of a single person, Gregg Harsh, who is employed as a security guard at FOW's headquarters. Dedicated totally to his cause, Harsh spends his free hours trying to unionize employees of a truck stop as well. He is as resourceful and manipulative observer of other persons as Colby is. In his position as gatekeeper for FOW, he is privy to all the comings and goings at the headquarters, and he puts this knowledge to good use.

When Harsh meets Colby, he feigns ignorance of whom he's dealing with, but noting the latter's residence, claims to have driven a school bus in that area and asks if he knows a teacher there named Fran Cramer. Colby, for his part, coolly feigns ignorance of the teacher, who happens actually to be his wife—and a member of the teacher's union. From this point on, the boundaries