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Review of So Brave, Young, and Handsome by Leif Unger

Kevin Clouter

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So Brave, Young, and Handsome.

By Leif Enger.

May 2008. 336p. Atlantic, \$24 (0-87113-985-5).

Enger's first novel, *Peace like a River* (2001), sold more than a million copies, a dizzying amount for fiction. His second effort, unsurprisingly, is a meditation on success. It follows the misadventures of a best-selling author, Monte Becket, who cannot make his second novel work. By setting the story in 1915, Enger offers distance between his experience and Becket's. The strength in Becket's voice comes from a wonderful union of modesty and curiosity. Becket never lingers long on any subject—most chapters are only a few pages long—and the story moves quickly across an American West that offers cowboys, señoritas, and bandits who are regrettably familiar. Less familiar is Enger's authorial generosity; his willingness to show the good in his creations is not endearing so much as encouraging. Indeed, this alone is enough to spare Enger from the conclusion one of his characters reaches: "Why, poor Becket—you got no medicine, that's what it is. You used it all up in only the one book. You got no medicine left at all!" —*Kevin Clouter*

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