

Fear of Paradise

Vincent Engel

Richard Kutner, Translator

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Tiny San Nidro, nestled between forest and sea in southern Italy's Puglia region, is a forgotten place, locked in the past and graced with wild beauty. Many of its young people have left to seek their fortunes elsewhere; the few remaining inhabitants subsist on fishing and what they can grow on their land. Simple, rustic, and superstitious, the villagers live under the control of their parish priest. One day, Lucia, a "translucent girl with blue eyes," is brought to San Nidro by Filippo, an odd old man who lives in the forest. Lucia is lovely, strange, and foreign, which is to say suspect, and when she and young Basilio fall in love, village social conventions are rocked.

Italy in the 1920s is in tumult; Mussolini's rise to power is causing the tentacles of fascism to reach into its remotest regions, tempting young men with visions of their country's return to glory and making widows of its women. The young lovers have promised to remain together in San Nidro, but other promises, and the acts done to keep them, intervene to separate the two. As the story unfolds, each is forced to wander a labyrinth of lies, lust, evil, and the devastation of war that holds them, and their promise, captive.

Award-winning Belgian author Vincent Engel is a professor of literature and history at the University of Louvain and the author of fourteen novels as well as novellas, essays, and plays.

Richard Kutner is an award-winning translator who holds a BA in French literature from Yale and an MA in education from New York University.

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