ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

BIOGRAPHY

Lucky 7
Robert Montagnese
978-1-4343-0869-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

This respected advertising and fashion executive turned author reaches beyond workaday creativity with *Lucky 7* a subtle literary collection of small-frame classy tributes to women on pedestals. The lost art of the indirect voice is applied to this cycle and the author appears to be influenced by the Raymond Carver fallacy: almost nothing happens = artful literature. The subjects presumably real people are revealed only to a point before an honorable respect for privacy conflicts with the storytelling drive. Perhaps fiction is easier to balance than are recounts of breathing individuals.

The thematic thread of patching together a nuanced understanding of women definitely runs through each story. The lessons are spelled out as epigrams on the story title pages and all the titles are women's names. For example *Sweet Sue*: "A secret is only protected if kept secret." Though the narrator doesn't give away the silent burden oblique references make it possible to deduce. Sue provides an aspect for analysis by losing her cool in public and the author asks rhetorically "…is it strength or weakness that tilts the emotional display? Perhaps both for it's a woman's mystique that seamlessly blends the two."

The last two stories stand on the shoulders of the previous five. *Patty* which beautifully renders a person known for spreading uncontrollable laughter and the mother-son relationship piece *Florence* benefit from a cautious emergence from the otherwise tightly restrained style. The author here abandons his role as a static listening post moving into the spotlight and speaking from sincerity about his own interesting experience. The description of leaving a basketball team in humiliation after panicking on the court pivots on a horror-inducing simile: "I noticed that there was a strange combination of silence and muffled cheers in the locker room a sound to this day that is unsettling. A sound that I imagine you would experience if you were buried under dirt and no one on the ground even knew you were below."

Montagnese guest-lectures at leading universities in Manhattan. He is Worldwide Brand Director for L'Oreal Paris and Executive Vice President of McCann-Erickson following an education and career in nursing. His partner John Higgins introduced the author to some of

subjects of his stories. *Lucky 7* is a sophisticated set of snapshots as much about holding back as expression. It's smart stylized New York writing about classically strong women and a trustworthy friend who is always ready to listen laugh or commiserate.

Todd Mercer