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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SHORT STORIES

Nectar Fragments

Michael Hoffman
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In terms of Nectar it is implausible. Nectar's such a … well such a sensible little community. But in terms of the world at large believe me it's Nectar that's implausible. "The Connection"

Reading short stories is something of an art for those who regularly read fiction. Instead of chapters woven together in a complex narrative short stories must be able to stand on their own. Author Michael Hoffman has managed to combine the two narrative forms in his collection *Nectar Fragments* for the stories do stand alone but also flow together as themes and characters twist in and out of the text from one tale to the next.

This is Hoffman's second story collection and he has separated it into two parts: *The Presentiment* and *Nectar Fragments*. The four stories in *The Presentiment* are set in various locations including Japan and Germany. The stories in *Nectar Fragments* are set in the fictional Montreal suburb of Nectar. Hoffman himself was born Canada and he has lived most of his life in Japan.

The residents of Nectar Canada run the gamut from the obscure figure everyone passes and no one notices to high-profile residents for whom appearances are everything for they conceal everything. Main characters become minor players from one story to the next and the arrival of a familiar figure in an unfamiliar role is compelling often sending this reader back to reread and re-evaluate.

Writers and writing are explored throughout the collection with Hoffman providing insights into the creative process which writers will recognize at once. In the *Nectar Fragments* stories several of the characters are authors or people involved in the newspaper business. In *The Presentiment* section all four stories present some aspect of writing as a main theme.

At the end of story "The Presentiment" an off-the-cuff observation by the main character triggers an author's muse lifting his writer's block and sending him into his fictional world as fast as he can write. "Writing is not of course a spectator sport and yet I watched him entranced so complete was his absorption in what he was doing so totally had he forgotten my existence though I sat right beside him our knees practically touching."

Despite the short form Hoffman's characters are richly multi-dimensional and his choice of each word each phrase signifies with meaning and purpose.
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