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Erotica

Obsessed: Erotic Romance for Women
Rachel Kramer Bussel, editor
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Writing about sex for the sake of sex is a literary art form attempted by many but mastered by few, as editor Rachel Kramer Bussel demonstrates in her latest erotic anthology. *Obsessed* is an unconventional collection of nineteen short stories for women by some of the best writers in the genre.

Overall, these stories explore sexual situations and describe intimate encounters, rather than place explicit scenes in a plot propelled by external factors and emotional involvement. This is not to say the book's content is poor, since it achieves its purpose. The authors tend to pursue male-oriented fantasy from the viewpoint of a female protagonist, subtly transferring his craving for lust and adventure onto her, often to the point of indulgence. Not that the women in these contrived pieces do not receive pleasure in return—they certainly do; yet this fiction often veers into staged scenarios that exhibit a male, rather than female, recreational pursuit.

Within this collection, however, are also trademark descriptions straight from a romance novel. In "Raindrops and Rooftops," by British author Elizabeth Coldwell, the sweetness of this scene could have easily come from a classic movie: "And it was romantic, crazily so, to be standing on a New York rooftop in the rain, sharing kisses with a man I'd only just met. My hands roved down his body, feeling the muscles beneath the designer clothing. His mouth worked its way along my neck and into the hollow of my throat as I sagged against him …"

While most of these stories shy away from sadomasochistic activity, a few incorporate mischievous spanking, harmless sex toys, and fixations on strange objects, such as a hook. Ethical boundaries, if violated at all, are crossed in a consensual manner. Certain situations elicit laughter more than arousal.

In "One Night in Paris" by Kayla Perrin, an executive assistant infatuated with her boss flies from Dallas to meet him at a French hotel: "There's a tall, attractive bald man working at the front desk who has glanced my way several times since I've been sitting in the lobby. I first

noticed him checking me out when I arrived at the hotel and got my keys to Aaron's suite. I'm sure he was surprised to see me come back downstairs a short while after check-in, dressed in my shiny red boots and black leather coat."

The book's overall theme is obsession and the ways a fixation can be expressed. Heroines range from naïve to savvy, single or married. Certain stories display an unfortunate excess, which is typical of erotica; maneuvers and manipulation override spontaneity in some scenes.

Rachel Kramer Bussel is a prolific author, editor, and blogger based in New York City. Her work has appeared in over one hundred anthologies, and she has edited over thirty books of erotica. She is the senior editor at *Penthouse Variation*.

Bussel's unusual selections and meticulous editing are to be commended, yet that elusive mark of quality remains subjective.

Julia Ann Charpentier