



Clarion Review

Short Stories

Profiles in Courage: The Rest of the Story

Eli Granger

978-1-4259-7418-3

Three Stars (out of Five)

I know people. And I know every human being has something—some imperfection, deviant behavior, bigotry or sin—that they don't want exposed.

These twenty-eight short stories are faux biographies and autobiographies of fictional women, all penned by Eli Granger. They tackle hot button social issues, including abortion, homosexuality, prisoner abuse and ill-considered invasions. Institutions such as the military and fundamentalist churches are examined from internal vantage points and skewered for their hypocritical contradictions. The characters have capabilities beyond the scope of their limited self-knowledge. They are surprised by their own unconventional actions. Franklinesque aphorisms sprinkled about function as both humor and sensible advice. For example: "...no idea conceived while drunk should be implemented until it has been reevaluated by a sober mind."

Other twists of phrase reflect the cynical wit of manipulators and self-promoters: "In the beginning I knew nothing about managing property and the opportunities I seized were almost always the wrong ones. But enough about my choice in men."

Nearly all subject characters appear at least twice, though not all the stories are interlinked with all others. Some connected sets deal with relationships and small decisions of fateful consequences in a manner akin to Victor LaValle's *Slapboxing With Jesus*. Characters who experience runs of good luck try to quickly amass small fortunes, as the window of opportunity will surely close. Granger suggests that happiness is waiting to be toppled any day by a drug bust or an unwanted pregnancy.

The dominant voice is first person past, the tone of most stories is introspective. Inventive premises are the order of the day, but too many purportedly different narrators sound like the same person—a person who doesn't elicit a great deal of empathy. Pacing is not rapid

enough, except in the best stories, such as *Suspect Subject*. Female fiction writers have long been producing textured, dimensional male protagonists. Carson McCullers, one of many, had it down cold fifty years ago. Since Jim Harrison wrote the superb *Dalva* from a woman's point of view in 1988, the floodgates have opened. The ability to comprehend both genders is no longer a novelty.

Eli Granger, a navy veteran with degrees in history and political science has written fifteen novels. This is his fourth collection of short stories. He hit on the device of a female viewpoint in his previous work, *Stories of Love, Sex and Marriage*. His forthcoming work, using the perspectives of both genders is entitled *He Said, She Said. Profiles in Courage ...The Rest of the Story* probably looked great on the drawing board. It deserves commendation for grappling directly with topics normally avoided, but it simply lacks the flair or emotional gravity needed for complete success. Nevertheless, it could fit the bill for readers who most value originality of concept or the frank discussion of touchy subjects.