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The Fairy Flag: and Other Stories

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Unattainable women… travel to exotic places…

convicts in prison… the subjects in this collection of short stories evoke a medley of sensations, yet a theme runs through the book: elusive or ruined happiness. From brief pieces like *Dancing Girl* to longer stories like *The Apartment* and *The Fairy Flag,* this collection can be enjoyed on a number of levels.

"Laughter-so different from the dark amusement we'd known for the last three years [in prison]-a vacuum of negative energy, where everything, even humor, was fueled by violence." Sometimes, as in "Like Prayers," such hard-to-find happiness is recalled in memories: "Do you remember, brother—Skipping rope, waiting for the ice cream man." This memory is juxtaposed against a harsher recollection: "mother talking on the telephone before we found out there wasn't always someone on the line," and the tension between the mother and father: "I watched a sliver of something" as she turns away from him to look out the window.

In *Khajuraho Triptych*, composed of three stories about travel to exotic lands, the character merely watches others live fully, while his own living is unfulfilled. "He wasn't sure what went wrong, but he imagined it began the day they met and fell in love." Now, "there was a formal silence between them, not the comfortable quiet of two people in love."

"Mal Occhio" (the evil eye) describes an old woman who looks back on a disappointing life, her youth used up with a husband she didn't love. She, too, must settle for fleeting moments of happiness, in the context of larger ruined expectations. "She remains awake trying to form and shape a picture of her future. She's crying, and she's not afraid to cry. 'Am I too old for a future,' she asks as if someone's in the room. And she wonders, 'Had the future come and gone'"

The author is a carpenter by trade, and teaches writing, literature, and film at The City College Center for Worker Education and Parsons School of Design, in New York City. Some of his stories have won fiction awards.

These stories will be appreciated by a wide audience, as they evoke wide ranges of emotion, from the violent to the poetic. In the end, readers learn from an ex-con on parole who has written a book in *The Apartment*, "We pardon to the extent that we love."
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