



The Nostalgist

Griffin Hansbury

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To whom do tragedies belong? Griffin Hansbury's debut novel introduces us to Jonah Soloway, a lonely New York copy editor who is haunted by lost moments and missed opportunities. He can't shake an autumn memory of his thumb blotting out the Twin Towers, buildings he considered an aesthetic abomination until terrorists felled them just weeks later. That edit now strikes him as a portent equal to others amongst his seemingly innocuous decisions: the casual request that led to his mother's death on the New Jersey turnpike, a loss marked by no memorials; and the words he almost said to Rose Oliveri, his lovely and enigmatic neighbor who he now only encounters on missing posters. Overwhelmed by his isolation, Jonah reaches out to Rose's parents and finds himself inventing a narrative of loss rooted in what might have been.

Jonah is vivified by his now righteous mourning. He becomes a fixture in the Oliveris' lives, attending holiday meals, accompanying Rose's mother, Vivian, on shopping trips, and taking over care of Rose's dog. He even allows Keith, his affable if smutty coworker, to persuade him to visit the bars and parties of New York's night life, scenes he's always avoided on principle but into which he now inserts himself in the name of recovery. At one such party, he meets Jane, a fast-talking budding psychoanalyst who slowly becomes his closest confidant. Together, they meditate on mortality and melancholia. Is Jane right when she says that forgetting is an important evolutionary tool, or is Jonah's insistence on remembering the faces of all he's seen and now lost a more humane endeavor? Is life best lived somewhere in between? Jonah struggles to situate himself in a post-9/11 landscape, all the while desperate to keep the Oliveris from comprehending the truth.

Hansbury's novel is a stunning addition to the budding canon of 9/11-literature. It avoids sensationalism in favor of focusing, with emotional erudition, on the peripheral impacts of national tragedies. As Jane notes amongst a plethora of memorabilia at Ground Zero, "everyone wants a piece of this grief." Hansbury leaves the question of ownership open, but his pages are an eloquent challenge to the reader to look beyond the ephemera, and his characters are a compelling reminder that the wounded and the lost can't be comprehensively captured on any list. With its quirky and appealing characters and beautifully disquieting prose, *The Nostalgist* is certain to pique readers long after its last page is turned.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (September 4, 2012)

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