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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ SHORT STORIES

The Saint of Istanbul

ChanCe
Roxanne Yurchak, translator
AuthorHouse
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Set in major metropolitan locales such as Chicago, New York, London, and Berlin, The Saint of Istanbul is an intriguing assortment of literary snapshots that resemble life as represented by the pages in a scrapbook. Far from aimless, these twenty-three short stories are a creative stroll through the sights, sounds, and sensations experienced by a seasoned world traveler.

Written in Turkish, the book has been translated into English. The quality of the translation is good, despite the occasional awkward phrase.

For a reader seeking the strong plot lines with single-minded characters typical of commercial fiction, ChanCe's book is not a good choice. But for any literary aficionado, her writing offers a welcome departure from the mainstream. Evocative and direct, ChanCe's style enhances the interesting vignettes which are delivered in rapid-fire succession.

With a feminist slant, the author traverses cultural and religious boundaries using courage and humor. A straightforward approach is executed with confidence in "The Fifth Azan," a contemporary look at the invasive aspects of established tradition: "Having sex on Moslem soil is always a challenge. Suddenly, you have the risk of becoming a trio—you, your partner and the Arab guy on the minaret, which is called the muezzin. At least once a day, you are in danger of being interrupted by a man screaming Arabic words when you are in a compromising position …"

With a spirited lack of inhibition, "Love Castration" offers a candid glimpse of a Paris brothel from the viewpoint of Fatima, a madam savoring the power she has over men: "If you ever want to be a real hooker, you've got to strangle your man with your sexuality…" Fatima tells her story about falling in love with a client who treated her badly, narrating it in gritty, explicit detail: "Our last sexual encounter had to be an event remembered by generations, like the last supper [sic] of Christ."

The book's downfall is a tendency to overplay scenes to the point of crudeness. A blurb on the back cover in need of a proofreader is also problematic.

ChanCe was born in Istanbul. A medical professor, writer, and singer, this brilliant newcomer is sure to find her niche with a sophisticated American audience that seeks urban realism.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (October 11, 2011)

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