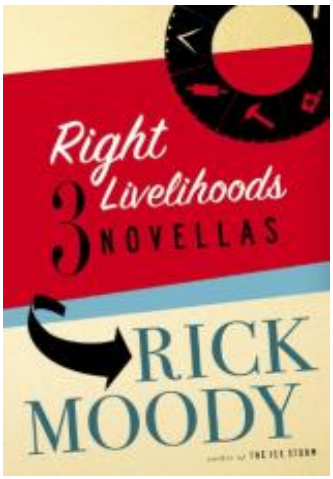
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Right Livelihoods: Three Novellas

by Rick Moody



About the Book

Right Livelihoods begins with a cataclysmic vision of New York City after the leveling of 50 square blocks of Manhattan. Four million have died. Albertine, the "street name for the buzz of a lifetime," is a mind-altering drug that sets The Albertine Notes in motion. The collection's second novella, K & K, concerns a lonely young office manager at an insurance agency, where the office suggestion box is yielding unpleasant messages that escalate to a scary pitch. Ellie Knight-Cameron's responses to these random diatribes illuminate the toll that a lack of self-awareness can take. At the center of The Omega Force is a buffoonish former government official in rocky recovery. Dr. "Jamie" Van Deusen is determined to protect his habitat --- its golf courses (and Bloody Marys), pizza places (and beers) from "dark-complected" foreign nationals. His patriotism and wild imagination are mainly fueled by a fall off the wagon. Only Rick Moody could lead us to feel affection for this man and the other misguided, earnestly striving characters in these alternately unsettling, warm, trio of stories.

Discussion Guide

1. How do you think the Buddhist concept of ?right livelihood? (making a living without harming others) plays out in these three novellas? For instance, did Dr. ?Jamie? Van Deusen see his work at the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (page 25) as having a virtuous effect? Do you? Are Ellie Knight- Cameron and Kevin Lee proud of their jobs as office manager and journalist, respectively?

2. In what ways are the three novellas linked by a post- 9/11 national psychology? In ?The Omega Force,? Dr. Van Deusen thinks he?s involved in ?a conspiracy that threatened not only the island [where he lives] but the very liberties we so cherish.? Ellie of ?K&K? believes an unknown predator is threatening her and her office. In ?The Albertine Notes,? lower New York has been leveled by a blast, and the survivors self- medicate with a mind- altering drug. Are paranoia and self- delusion natural reactions to disasters? Is self- destruction?

3. Which did you respond to most: the realistic rendition of post- traumatic emotions in ?K&K?? The seriocomic approach of ?The Omega Force?? Or the futuristic elements of ?The Albertine Notes??

4. The protagonist of each novella attempts to transcend the distressing realities of his or her life and times. How are the coping mechanisms of all three protagonists similar? Is Van Deusen?s belief in the ?Dance of the Stick? similar to Ellie?s misguided hope for reviving a long- ago love affair, and to Kevin?s desire to revive only the best memories of the past, erasing reality?

5. All three novellas are set in the American Northeast, but their backdrops are entirely distinctive and particular. How does each of the main characters reflect his or her place of residence? Are Van Deusen?s patriotism and addiction, Ellie?s rootless loneliness, and Kevin?s ambition typical of their respective places?

6. How is reading and misreading key to each story? Meaning and misunderstanding?

7. Ellie is the only main character who doesn?t use mind altering substances, and yet she is arguably the least self aware of them all. Do you think her parents contributed to her state of solitude and denial?

8. Does Kevin Lee?s being of Asian ancestry inform the way he is perceived by the author or by you, the reader?

9. Do you consider Dr. Van Deusen a likable character, even given his foolishness? If so, how has Rick Moody managed to elicit this positive response?

10. If 9/11 were a more widespread catastrophe --- if four million had died, as in ?The Albertine Notes? --- how would your reactions to the event differ?

Author Bio

Rick Moody is the author of two memoirs --- THE LONG ACCOMPLISHMENT and the award-winning THE BLACK VEIL --- the novels HOTELS OF NORTH AMERICA, THE FOUR FINGERS OF DEATH, THE DIVINERS, PURPLE AMERICA, THE ICE STORM and GARDEN STATE, and multiple collections of short fiction. Moody is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, and his work has been anthologized in *Best American Stories*, *Best American Essays* and the Pushcart Prize anthology. He lives in Rhode Island.

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