



No Saints or Angels

By Ivan Klíma

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Ivan Klíma has been acclaimed by The Boston Globe as "a literary gem who is too little appreciated in the West" and a "Czech master at the top of his game." In No Saints or Angels, a Washington Post Best Book of 2001, Klíma takes us into the heart of contemporary Prague, where the Communist People's Militia of the Stalinist era marches headlong into the drug culture of the present. Kristyna is in her forties, the divorced mother of a rebellious fifteen-year-old daughter, Jana. She is beginning to love a man fifteen years her junior, but her joy is clouded by worry -- Jana has been cutting school, and perhaps using heroin. Meanwhile Kristyna's mother has forced on her a huge box of personal papers left by her dead father, a tyrant whose Stalinist ideals she despised. No Saints or Angels is a powerful book in which "Mr. Klíma's keen sense of history, his deep compassion for the ordinary people caught up in its toils, and his abiding awareness of the fragility and resilience of human life shine through.... Like Anton Chekhov, Mr. Klíma is a writer able to show us what's extraordinary about ordinary life." (The Washington Times). "Ultimately, it's Prague, with its centuries of glory and misery, that gives No Saints or Angels its humane power." -- Melvin Jules Bukiet, The Washington Post Book World" A compassionate realist, [Klíma] unflinchingly presents the problems facing modern Prague and civilization in general ... [and] fills it with mercy." -- Jennie Yabroff, San Francisco Chronicle "Stirring and valuable." -- Jules Verdone, The Hartford Courant

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Klma, internationally acclaimed author of a substantial body of work (Love and Garbage; Lovers for a Day; etc.), deconstructs a contemporary Czech family in his latest effort. Kristina, a divorced mother in her 40s, works as a dentist in Prague. Burdened with responsibilities, she is the sole caregiver for her aging, widowed mother; her terminally ill ex-husband; and her 15-year-old daughter, Jana, who may or may not be using hard drugs. Lonely and starved for affection, Kristina begins dating Jan, a former student of her ex-husband and her junior by 15 years. While she tries to use the romance and morning glasses of wine to erase mounting concerns, Kristina is unable to overcome her own unsentimental perceptions. "I'm no Isadora Duncan," she reflects, thinking of the famous dancer and her much younger paramour, the Russian poet Yesenin. "I'm not famous, I'm simply as old as she was and know how to fix people's teeth. My lover is no poet and I'm sure he won't kill himself; he enjoys life and enjoys playing games." While most of the story is told through Kristina's eyes, Klma periodically shifts the narrative to Jana's and Jan's point of view, channeling common incidents through the eyes of three different generations. Although philosophical musings weigh heavily on the action on occasion, this compelling, bleak story is worthy of Klma's growing acclaim.

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From Library Journal

"I killed my husband last night," Klma's novel begins dramatically. But this is no murder mystery: Kristyna has simply had another bad dream, one that reflects the overwhelming discontent of her life. Sure, the Velvet Revolution has rid her country of communism, but she is divorced, her ex-husband is brutally ill, her teenaged daughter is out of control, and she is bone-wearily nearing 50. What's more, her mother has just handed her what is indeed a Pandora's box containing the papers of her father an officious and unregenerate Communist who brushed aside her birth in March 1953 because Stalin died on the same day. The contents of that box don't exactly help her reconcile with her father, but they do open up a secret past that subtly shifts her perspective even as a much younger lover begins rocking her life. In the end, noted Czech novelist Klma (Judge on Trial) doesn't give his heroine any easy outs, but at least she learns that there are "no saints or angels." An affecting story, affectingly told: Klma believes in idealists, but he is too good a novelist to be rigid with his own characters. For most collections. Barbara Hoffert, "Library Journal"

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Review

'One of the leading Czech writers of the Kundera generation... Klma's prose is controlled and rueful. This is a novel of gently delivered wisdoms, played around a very human drama of tenderness and vulnerability' Independent on Sunday 'This big, clever, generous book is Ivan Klma's best yet' Times Literary Supplement 'He has a quiet, clear style paying forensic attention to the causes of happiness and misery, making him peculiarly absorbing... A highly intelligent novel' Sunday Tribune 'A fascinating read' Independent 'Klma's thoughtful novel ends with delicate cogency, as a tribute to human resilience' Sunday Times

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Stephen Louis:

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Ann Wren:

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