Nate in Venice

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In this warm, bighearted novella, Pulitzer Prize winner Richard Russo ("Nobody's Fool," "Straight Man," "Empire Falls") transports his characters from the working-class East Coast of his novels to one of Europe's most romantic cities. In classic Russo fashion, however, he packs along their foibles and frailties. His latest foray into the messy beauty of the human heart, "Nate in Venice" is written with the same wry humor and ready generosity for which he's been so richly praised.

After a tragic incident with a student, Nate, a professor at a small New England college, retires from teaching and from life. He ends his self-imposed exile with a tour-group trip to Venice in the company of his overbearing, mostly estranged brother. Nate is unsure he's equipped for the challenges of human contact, especially the fraternal kind. He tries to play along, keep up, mixing his antidepressants with expensive Chianti, but while navigating the labyrinthine streets of the ancient, sinking city, the past greets him around every corner, even in his dreams: There's the stricken face of the young woman whose life he may have ruined, and there's Julian, the older brother who has always derided and discounted him. Is Nate sunk? Is the trip, the chance to fall in love—in fact, his whole existence—merely water under the ponte?

Maybe or maybe not. In Russo's world, the distance between disaster and salvation is razor thin, and a mensch can be a fool (and vice versa). Nate's Venetian high-wire act proves as harrowing as a potboiler and as full of reversals as a romantic comedy. It's an emphatic tribute to all the pleasures and possibilities of the novella.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Award-winning novelist and screenwriter Richard Russo is the author of seven novels and two short-story collections. "Empire Falls" won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2002. His most recent book is the memoir "Elsewhere." He lives with his wife in Portland, Maine.

PRAISE FOR "NATE IN VENICE"

Richard Russo's "Nate in Venice" is the beautifully written, heartbreaking story of a decent man's attempt to find some peace, on a short vacation in Italy, from the horrific dissolution of his professional life, family, and, perhaps, his own grasp on reality. It is the best, and most emotionally powerful, work of fiction exploring how terrible things can and often do happen to admirable people since Philip Roth's "American Pastoral." With "Nate in Venice," Richard Russo has confirmed, yet again, that he is contemporary America's preeminent fiction writer. —Howard Frank Mosher, author of "Walking to Gatlinburg"

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