

Excommunicados (Iowa Short Fiction Award)

Charles Haverty



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By turns haunting, hilarious, and heartbreaking, Charles Haverty's debut collection charts the journeys of men, women, and children cast out of familiar territory into emotional terra incognita where people and things are rarely what they seem. These twelve stories are populated with ex-nuns and Freedom Riders, Chaucer scholars and strippers, out-of-work comedy writers and presidents, navigating their way through bedrooms and emergency rooms, backyard burial parties and airplane crash sites, the Piazza San Marco and the post-apocalyptic suburbs of Boston.

A sixteen-year-old boy unearths grisly evidence of his genteel grandfather's racist past. At his sister's boozesoaked destination wedding, a recovering alcoholic English professor is finagled into ghostwriting their unreliable father's nuptial toast. A small town lawyer's Edenic existence is jeopardized when his wife's younger brother is arrested for a rash of local burglaries. In the wake of her daughter's brush with disaster in the Haiti earthquake, a mother finds herself drawn down a dark neighborhood sidewalk toward what might or might not be a dead body. And in the title story—the first of three linked stories—a pious altar boy confronts the twin mysteries of sex and death through the auspices of a classmate's divorced mother.

There are secrets at the center of each of these daring and original stories—secrets that separate these characters from one another but grow in the mind and the heart, connecting them with all of us.

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