



The People I Know

Nancy Zafris

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The People I Know is a collection of nine stories, told by characters who hover at the edge of life. Whether it's Lorne, perched on a sofa as a wedding party swirls around him, or the elderly Mrs. R of "Morning at the Beach," imagining a career in crime as she sits on the front porch of a Miami hotel, these are people oddly accustomed to the sidelines of their worlds.

Nancy Zafris's characters do not so much hurdle their barriers as contemplate them with varying degrees of humor, regret, and fanciful expectation. Gazing out of his window at a horizon of crushed cars, Bonner Junior fantasizes about working at an I.M. Pei office building instead of at John Bonner and Son Metal Shredders; at the same time, his job allows him to amuse his friends with grisly, embellished stories of human shreadings and wild dogs. In "Meeting in Tokyo," a businessman examines his own attraction and aversion to conformity after taking a young secretary to a "love hotel." For Wendy, born with a strong nose and a Baltic name, cosmetic surgery has brought acceptance but also boredom. Suffering little "deaths of feeling" with each success, she flirts with disaster, with anything that will make her heartbeat "go up to 75 or more." Grace, in "Grace's Reply," prefers to deal with reality through illusion; she blames her son's death on a Navy intelligence operation and sends Pampers to an imaginary grandson.

Ranging from the kiddie bleachers of television's "Uncle Sylvester Show" to the upholstered seats of a Tokyo coffee shop, from a Navy recruitment office to a meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous, these stories enliven the common places of our world. Sad, yet rarely defeated, Nancy Zafris's characters toe the line and sometimes manage to cross it.

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