

Moira Orfei in Aigues-Mortes: A Novel

Wayne Koestenbaum



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Five years of breakdown separate pianist Theo Mangrove's last recital in Europe from his planned comeback in Aigues-Mortes, "the town of dead water." At home in tiny East Kills, NY, Theo begins jotting in 25 notebooks, purchased all at once and addressed to his mother. Theo's wife, aside from servicing two of Theo's twenty daily erections, will have nothing to do with him. The other eighteen—taken care of by male hustlers, random strangers in YMCA locker-rooms and naked piano students—contribute to Theo's sense of dissolution as his "comeback" approaches. Overcome with the belief that Moira Orfei, queen of the Italian circus during the 1960's, must perform with him, Theo begins to write to her and to pen what may or may not be her cryptic replies into his notebooks. In a fugue of notes and troubling memories, Theo prepares for Aigues-Mortes, struggling with Moira's guidance towards one final, full celebration of "the partial, the flawed, the almost, the not quite." Peopled by piano playing relatives, prostitutes, muses and manipulators; poet and cultural critic Wayne Koestenbaum's first novel shines a hot light on the treacherous crossroads of sex, death, family and popular culture.

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