



The Romanian: Story of an Obsession

Bruce Benderson

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Winner of the 2004 Prix de Flore—one of France's most distinguished literary prizes—a wildly romantic, true-life love story

“History follows a trail of sputtering desire, often calling upon the delusions of lovers to generate the sparks. If it weren’t for us, the world would suffer from a dismal lack of stories,” writes Bruce Benderson in this brutally candid memoir.

“What astonishes and intrigues is Benderson’s way of recounting, in the sweetest possible voice, things that are considered shocking,” wrote *Le Monde*. What’s so shocking? It’s not just Benderson’s job translating Céline Dion’s saccharine autobiography, which he admits is driving him mad; but his unrequited love for an impoverished Romanian in “cheap club-kid platforms with dollar signs in his squinting eyes,” whom he meets while on a journalism assignment in Eastern Europe.

Rather than retreat, Benderson absorbs everything he can about Romanian culture and discovers an uncanny similarity between his own obsession for the Romanian (named Romulus) and the disastrous love affair of King Carol II, the last king of Romania (1893-1953). Throughout, Benderson—“absolutely free of bitterness, nastiness, or any desire to protect himself,” wrote *Le Monde*—is sustained by little white codeine pills, a poetic self-awareness, a sense of humor, and an unwavering belief in the perfect romance, even as wild dogs chase him down Romanian streets.

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