



# Brief Encounters with the Enemy: Fiction

*Said Sayrafiezadeh*

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# Brief Encounters with the Enemy: Fiction

Saïd Sayrafiezadeh

**Brief Encounters with the Enemy: Fiction** Saïd Sayrafiezadeh

**The first short story collection from a writer who calls to mind such luminaries as Denis Johnson, George Saunders, and Nathan Englander**

**FINALIST FOR THE PEN/ROBERT W. BINGHAM PRIZE • NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY *BOOKPAGE* AND *BOOKISH***

When *The New Yorker* published a short story by Saïd Sayrafiezadeh in 2010, it marked the emergence of a startling new voice in fiction. In this astonishing book, Sayrafiezadeh conjures up a nameless American city and its unmoored denizens: a call-center employee jealous of the attention lavished on a co-worker newly returned from a foreign war; a history teacher dealing with a classroom of maliciously indifferent students; a grocery store janitor caught up in a romantic relationship with a kleptomaniac customer. These men's struggles and fleeting triumphs—with women, with cruel bosses, with the morning commute—are transformed into storytelling that is both universally resonant and wonderfully strange. Sometimes the effect is hilarious, as when a would-be suitor tries to take his sheltered, religious date on a tunnel of love carnival ride. Other times it's devastating, as in the unforgettable story that gives the book its title: A soldier on his last routine patrol on a deserted mountain path finally encounters "the enemy" he's long sought a glimpse of.

Upon giving the author the Whiting Writers' Award for his memoir, *When Skateboards Will Be Free*, the judges hailed his writing as "intelligent, funny, utterly unsmug and unpreening." These fiercely original stories show their author employing his considerable gifts to offer a lens on our collective dreams and anxieties, casting them in a revelatory new light.

## **Praise for *Brief Encounters with the Enemy***

"With impressive guile and design, Mr. Sayrafiezadeh uses the arrival and escalation of that war as the through-line connecting each personal drama. . . . These calculated echoes work to unify [his] haunting book in a way that story collections rarely manage."—**Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal***

"In his memoir, Sayrafiezadeh told the remarkable tale of a childhood steeped in doomed dogma. His stories . . . offer something more: a searing vision of his wayward homeland, delivered not in the clamoring rhetoric of a revolutionary, but in the droll monologues of young men who kill because they lack the moral imagination to do otherwise."—**Steve Almond, *The New York Times Book Review* (Editors' Choice)**

"Sayrafiezadeh's eight interlinked stories are just as fulfilling as any novel you're likely to read this summer."—***The Boston Globe***

"A tantalizing fiction debut . . . [that] menaces and mesmerizes."—***Elle***

"The recurring motifs include 99-cent American flags, putting in a word with the boss, idealistic Army recruitment brochures and unseasonable temperatures. Each time they recur they are more potent, and poignant. The collection is readable, and real, and hopefully a harbinger of more fiction to come from Sayrafiezadeh."—***Minneapolis Star Tribune***

“Funny and surprising . . . Sayrafiezadeh’s simple style can fool you into thinking that his struggling narrators are plain and unassuming. They are anything but. . . . Each story compels you to read the next, and no character escapes unscathed.”—*The Daily Beast*

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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#### **Stefanie Roach:**

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#### **Tina McKinney:**

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