

John Fraser has lived in Rome since 1980. Previously, he worked in England and Canada.

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Short Lives, the latest work of fiction by John Fraser ('the most original novelist of our time', John Fuller, Whitbread Award winner and Booker Prize nominee) consists of two stories about aspiration, and how that is suited to a short reflective life rather than a long happenstance.

'O the Poor Horses' tells of a super-athlete, climber and circus star, Pierre, whose aim is to reach the top of the tent, and then beyond – perfection of the body and its mind. When Pierre tumbles and is crippled, Dora, his assistant and companion, once his facilitator who has become a dead weight, must take on the salvation of his aims. They are joined by Julie – there to catch the fallers, and to shoot unruly animals. She and Dora carry the wounded Pierre away, joined by Masha, the horsewoman – an athlete whose speed and direction depend on her horse, only in part her mind and body.

'Where the Philosophers Go' concerns Vince – his work, life, fate and reflections. His is a life without direction, without aspiration... He meets everyone from tycoons to avatars, experiences everything, but what is life and where does it go? he asks himself. Is meaning revealed through intensity or is the meaning simply accumulated, in long and random experience? Anonymously, he is recommended a supreme virtue – if the most hollow, and the hardest to pursue – that of loyalty.



Front cover: *The Hanged Man (XII) (L'Appeso) Tarot card*

SHORT LIVES John Fraser

SHORT LIVES

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JOHN FRASER
'the most original novelist of our time'

John Fuller

Well, Masha,' Dora says, 'you can speak to people here. Maybe you know how it was. Not so good, I'd say – but trying hard. Being things not seen for centuries, that I'd not want to see again. And now, we can't go further on. It's all destroyed. And going back? You haven't got the granite in you – you run like chickens, here and there. Prepare, you two! Heresy is in your hearts, and fear as well – the worst subjects to resist a siege... Imagine – suppose it were all to end? Short lives – can you enjoy what you might have had? The little that you did? That all happened in a tent, it's true: it couldn't last. An awkward landing, a leg placed wrong ... the little that's enough...'

'It was just a show,' says Julie. 'I was on guard, in case it all got out of hand – stronger than a safety net, my gun. I never needed it – those lions were too afraid...'

'It's no one's fault,' says Masha. 'No one's responsible, so nothing can be changed.'

from Short Lives

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