



Copy Cats

David Crouse

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Featuring seven stories and a novella, David Crouse's powerful debut collection depicts people staring down the complicated mysteries of their own identities. "Who are you?" a homeless man asks his would-be benefactor in the title story. On the surface it's a simple question, but one that would stump many of the characters who inhabit these carefully rendered tales.

In the edgy novella "Click" Jonathan's ongoing photo-documentary of a prostitute exposes how little intensity remains between him and his fiancée, Margaret. While Jonathan is plagued with doubts about his motivations and abilities as an artist, Margaret is worn out by her obligations not just to her needy husband-to-be but to all the men in her life. In "The Ugliest Boy," Justin develops an odd friendship with Steven, his girlfriend's brother. Steven was disfigured by fire in a childhood accident. Justin bears wounds more deeply hidden. The two forge a strange bond based on their anger and pain.

Crouse's stories often involve people trapped on the margins of society, confronted by diminishing possibilities and various forms of mental illness. The junior executive in "Code" worries about his job—and his sanity—amid a sudden and wide-sweeping corporate layoff. A manic-depressive father and his teenage daughter dress as vampires and embark on a strange Halloween journey through their suburban neighborhood in the darkly humorous "Morte Infinita." In "Swimming in the Dark" a family gives up on itself. Shredded slowly over the years since the accidental drowning of the eldest son, the remaining family members seek their own separate peace, however imperfect.

The men and women in *Copy Cats* are unwilling and often unable to differentiate reality from fantasy. Cursed with what one of them calls "a pollution of ideas," these are people at war with their own imaginations.

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