

Evidence

By Ian Colford, \$22.95 (pb)

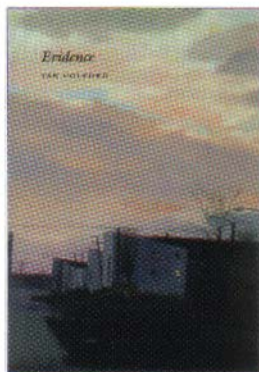
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“Forgive me for being blunt, but you’ll never get over the loss of your family. This kind of trauma marks a person for life. But I can see you want to make something of yourself, so you must harden your heart and move on.”

This assessment by a minor character named Jonah Keller in one of the interconnected and untitled stories in Halifax author Ian Colford’s *Evidence* basically sums up the

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collection's protagonist, Kostandin Bitri: Bitri is damaged, suspicious and ambitious.

Bitri is a war orphan from an unnamed Eastern European nation who wanders through Europe and North America, meeting an odd collection of men and women who both use and are used by him. Some, like Keller, an esteemed professor of art history, recognize the drive and desire in Bitri and set out to help him find his way in the world. Others, like Mrs. Lamond, the unbalanced and overly devoted mother of a severely disabled boy, hone in on Bitri's vulnerability and abuse it. Because of Bitri's traumatic history, he is as suspicious of kindness as he is of cruelty.

The stories are told in no particular order, and the geographical details are deliberately vague. At first it may seem as if sorting the stories into chronological order and pinpointing Bitri's exact origins and location in any given story are huge puzzles left for the reader. But eventually it becomes apparent that these details do not really matter: Colford has created a haunting character in Bitri, and the real puzzle is how easy it is to be enthralled by a violent, selfish and seemingly unlikeable man. Yet just as the inhabitants of these stories find themselves drawn to the mysterious Bitri, so too will the reader.—*Kate Watson*