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Panati's Extraordinary Endings of Practically Everything and Everybody

Charles Panati

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Hardcopy, 1989 by Charles Panati

From Publishers Weekly Panati (*Extraordinary Origins of Everyday Things*), former physicist and former science editor of Newsweek , brings to a potentially morbid or macabre subject his characteristically wry intellectual curiosity. Brief essays on "lasts" and "endings" run the gamut from the bequests of U.S. presidents (Truman left one grandnephew five dollars because he was a seminarian who had taken a vow of poverty) to the benighted medical procedures that inadvertently created the last great castrato singer: Giovanni Velluti. Panati's dogged pursuit of bizarre or unusual story threads makes this a book sure to satisfy the browser who is seduced by trivia. Demystifying many cultural icons in his meanderings through the habits of the renowned, he concludes that Florence Nightingale, bedridden for the last 54 of her 90 years, was afflicted with "productive hypochondria" that "allowed her to accomplish prodigious amounts of work from her bed"; and reports Walt Whitman's last words: "Garrulous to the very last." Again and again, Panati deftly verifies that death is, indeed, the great leveler. Photos not seen by PW. BOMC dividend; QPB alternate; author tour. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc.