



Secrets & Surprises

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These fifteen stories by Ann Beattie garnered universal critical acclaim on their first publication, earning Beattie the reputation as the most celebrated new voice in American fiction. Today these stories -- "A Vintage Thunderbird;" "The Lawn Party, " " La Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans," to name a few -- seem even more powerful, and are read and studied as classics of the short-story form. Spare and elegant, yet charged with feeling and with the tension of things their characters cannot say, they are masterly portraits of improvised lives.

Secrets & Surprises Details

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Author : Ann Beattie

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Rachael Samberg says

Before I really started reading short stories, I used to love Ann Beattie's. But I never want to revisit them. They are very specific to an era.

Diana says

what a great collection of short stories. Beattie's writing is similar to that of Updike's but her characters aren't as petty.

Connie Sandlin says

Boring and pointless. Not really short stories, just depressing vignettes mostly. Blech!

Lucas Miller says

I found a copy of this in my childhood bedroom at my parents house on a visit over the weekend. It had been purchased from McKay's Used Books and Media for \$1.50. My all time favorite used bookstore, it is exceedingly odd that the price sticker was still on the cover. Over the years it has become a custom bordering on ritual to get home from McKay's and look through my newly acquired books, slowly peeling the price stickers off of each one. When I found the book there was a bookmark at the end of the ninth story of the fifteen in the collection. I started there. I do not recall when or if I read the first two thirds of the book, but I'm confident I did.

Ann Beattie is a wonderful writer. At the sentence level, she can describe things vividly with a simplicity that amazes me. Some people might read these stories and feel like not much happens, but that is at the core of what I love so much about them. Beattie's stories are all about aftermath. The dislocation, the divorce, car accident, death, birth, or other big life event has already occurred in these stories, and the quiet moments Beattie writes about finds characters trying (or not) to put the pieces back together and go on living, somehow.

I joked on twitter that these stories feel like Denis Johnson short stories before all of the characters started doing heroin. I'll stand by that joke, but both authors have written plenty of stuff that proves me wrong.

The late 1970s feel palpable in this collection of stories. Small details about lifestyles, the big houses in the country, rural New Hampshire and Vermont. A self-conscious nonchalance about drugs and drinking. Divorce and small children. A national hangover, it's piercing just by its reality, the authenticity of the settings.

Read this. Read Chilly Scenes of Winter. Read the New Yorker Stories too. Highly recommended.

Myfanwy says

Can't believe I never read this before as she is one of my faves. Though the stories are 30+ years old, they all feel shockingly relevant to today.

Peter Zuppardo says

Probably the most perfect collection of stories I can think of. "Distant Music" should, if you're a decent person, make you cry.

John says

Beattie perfected that flat, New-Yorker style of writing - which can sometimes be an annoying cliché - but her best stories are poignant snapshots of non-communication and crisis, and a number of them are here.

J.P. says

They say Raymond Carver was the master of the 'minimalist' short story. I love Carver's work---but I believe Beattie gives him a run for his money in regards to the title of "master".

This is classic, in the best sense of the term---and also illustrates why 'minimalist' stories are anything but spare in terms of characterization, plot and theme.

Rita says

The stories are about boring characters. I couldn't really feel any of them. They seem to always be white people with pointless existences.
