



Honeydew

Edith Pearlman

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A new story collection from Edith Pearlman, winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award and finalist for the National Book Award for her last collection, *Binocular Vision*.

From the National Book Critics Circle Award-winning author of *Binocular Vision*, *Honeydew* further solidifies Edith Pearlman's place among the likes of all-time great story writers such as John Updike, Alice Munro, Frank O'Connor, and Anton Chekhov.

Pearlman writes about the predicaments of being human. The title story involves an affair, an illegitimate pregnancy, anorexia, and adolescent drug use, but the real excitement comes from the intricate attention Pearlman devotes to the interior life of young Emily, who wishes she were a bug. In "Sonny," a mother prays for her daughters to be barren so they never have to experience the death of a child. "The Golden Swan" transports the reader to a cruise ship with lavish buffets-and a surprise stowaway.

In prose that is as wise as it is poetic, Pearlman shines light on small, devastatingly precise moments to reflect the beauty and grace found in everyday life. She maps the psychological landscapes of her exquisitely rendered characters with unending compassion and seeming effortlessness.

Both for its artistry and for the lives of the characters it presents, *Honeydew* is a collection that will pull readers back time and again. These stories demonstrate once more that Pearlman is a master of the form and that hers is a vision unfailingly wise and forgiving.

Honeydew Details

Date : Published January 6th 2015 by Little, Brown and Company

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Author : Edith Pearlman

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From Reader Review Honeydew for online ebook

Sarah Cammelot says

Finally finished this one...

Eh. I can appreciate Pearlman's use of language-- she really is stellar at economically using prose in a vivid way, but there was just something about these stories that never really took off for me.

Dolly Anderson says

"Honeydew" is a collection of short stories. I received this book through the Goodreads/First Reads program for an honest review.

Early reviews gave much praise for this collection of short stories and I highly awaited receiving my copy. However, I am one whom simply didn't fall in love with this collection of short stories.

I feel the settings are often overly described to paint a picture of a place or the attributes of a character which will go on and on for what seems endlessly (yawning) and your waiting and waiting for something to happen (more yawns), then in less than a few sentences or a brief paragraph, this twist, a quirky observation, or a remark occurs. (that's it no more)

To put it bluntly, say your talking, then someone comes up to you and slaps you for no apparent reason

or

I like to think of it as a painting and than someone comes along and throws a bucket of paint on it, obliterating it.

It's these quick sudden changes with nothing more, that just leaves you there, perhaps to bring more attention to those last words.

Out of the 20 (twenty) stories in this collection, I liked 2 (two). So this collection fails for me.

Catherine says

The only three stories I liked here were "Tenderfoot", "The Descent of Happiness" (charming in its simplicity) and "Honeydew", which was a story I loved when I read it a couple of years ago. I loved re-reading it, too, which is why the book as a whole is such a major disappointment to me. This book is like the worst of fictional New England: It has the nerve to be pretentious without being in any way interesting.

Also, if you do read this, get ready to cringe every time she describes someone with brown skin. Ugh.

Ellie says

Honeydew: Stories is the second collection of short stories I've read by Edith Pearlman (Binocular Vision is the other).

The quality of the writing is breathtaking. And each story is as satisfying as a novel-something I would rarely (if ever) say about a short story. In a few pages, people, relationships, setting, are so fully presented I feel as though I had entered another world, completely realized. Whether it's the mistress of a girl's school having an affair with the father of an anorexic student, a mother settling the matrimonial futures of her daughter and daughter's friends (with names in a hat), or an overweight young woman on a cruise where she brushes against the real life of the ship's crew and sees beneath the surface of her own life, each story took me to a whole new place.

That being said, I will add that I can only read Pearlman when I am in the right mood. Her prose is elegant but distanced, the stories wry and ironic and sometimes too pure for me. Sometimes I prefer more mess. At those times, I simply put the book down because when I am in a more patient, calmer state, there is no author I'd rather read than Pearlman.

Jennifer (JC-S) says

'All the others were honeydew.'

When I requested a copy of this book of short stories, I had no idea what to expect. I'd not read any Edith Pearlman before. This collection of twenty short stories (each of them previously published in various journals) held my attention from the beginning of the first story to the end of the twentieth.

The longest of these stories is 22 pages, most are between 10 and 15 pages. And it's a tribute to Ms Pearlman's skill that she can construct a person, a group or family, a setting, a series of events, a lifetime in a way that is self-contained and satisfying to read. Words are not wasted. These stories are about relationships, about observing, about evaluating life choices. Some are unconventional love stories, others remind the reader that happiness can often be found along less conventional paths. Many (but not all) of these stories are set in a fictional Boston suburb inhabited by a multicultural cast of characters.

If you enjoy short stories about people, about possibilities and situations, then you may enjoy this collection. I did. I won't identify a favourite story, because my view will probably change when I reread the book, but I particularly liked the character of Rennie in 'Puck' and in 'Assisted Living'. Rennie has an antiques business called 'Forget Me Not' and while she observes much, Rennie is discreet, and does not offer advice. Each of these stories invites you through a significant event or moment into a life, and then to appreciate (at least part of) that life and to reflect on it. Consider 'Hat Trick', in which a recently widowed woman invites four 19 year old girls (including her daughter) to draw the names of their future husbands from a selection of names in a hat. And the result? Fifty years later, the mother is on her deathbed, and the daughter tells her what became of each of the girls: 'You did a marvellous thing, .. we are all happy enough.'

Note: My thanks to Netgalley and the publisher Hachette Australia for an opportunity to read a copy of this book.

Diane S ? says

These stories are told in a very economical use of prose and yet vividly descriptive. Many take place in Godolphin, Mass. And four stories contain Rennie. Two, prominently feature her and her store forget-me knot, and were among my favorites. One story on female circumcision was very hard to read and I have to admit to not understanding the end. What I most liked about these were they were about people living there lives, confronted with something strange or unexpected. How they react to these changes were sometimes unexpected. In one it took till the last line before I figured out why this story was being told. Than I had to smile, thinking aha, finally got it. Brilliant.

Short story readers will find much to admire in this collection.

ARC from publisher.

Lisa says

I had high hopes for Honeydew after reading several rave reviews. So I was surprised that this very competent collection of stories left me cold. Pearlman writes well-crafted sentences but populates her stories with people I had little interest in. I found myself peeking ahead to see how many pages were left of each story.

Chaitra says

If memory serves me right, the last collection of stories I genuinely loved was Rivka Galchen's *American Innovations*, which I read a year ago. I think I've lost the ability to appreciate short prose, because this particular collection, raved across the board, left me unmoved. Well. Except for one story: *Wait and See*, about a young man with a rare condition of the eye. A disappointment, but it's probably more me than the stories themselves.

Taryn Pierson says

This one came to my attention when it appeared on the fiction longlist for the National Book Award. I had never heard of Edith Pearlman (apparently I'm in good company there, as everything I read about her mentioned how little-known she is), but I was intrigued when I read that she began her writing career late in life. I'll read the next twenty-five-year-old wunderkind as eagerly as anyone, but there's something deeply comforting about people who don't write (or get published, or find critical acclaim) until they're of advanced age. It gives me hope for my own future.

I did not expect this collection to be as weird as it was. Some of Pearlman's imagery was surprising, disturbing, graphic...not at all what I expected from the white-haired, genteel lady on the jacket flap.

Respect, Edith. Do your thing. (But also—ew.) I'm trying to think of an example and failing—I must have blocked them out. I think there might have been biting?

There are several stories where the connections between characters are more extensive than they first appear, which was mind-bendy and cool. Overall, though, I don't know that I entirely "got" what Pearlman was doing, so maybe these were a little more literary than I as a casual reader really wanted.

More book recommendations by me at www.readingwithhippos.com

Domenico Fina says

Secondo libro di racconti (Dopo visione binoculare) di questa incantevole autrice, che leggo. I racconti di Edith Pearlman - colta signora 80enne, che ambienta le sue storie in una cittadina immaginaria del Massachussets - sono racconti che richiamano alla mente le più brave, da Munro a Berlin a Dorothy Parker per il solo fatto che i bravi e le brave sanno muoversi nell'essenziale. Pearlman di suo si tiene distante da vicende trafelate e da esistenze borderline, si muove nella media borghesia, che sa apprezzare quadri, manicure, negozi d'antiquariato. Non è mai noiosa o moraleggiante, spesso è giocosa e quando meno te l'aspetti, perfettamente aspra, come in un bellissimo racconto La discesa della felicità (il più breve della raccolta, racconto di sole 6 pagine) dove la voce narrante, una donna, ricorda un giorno in cui suo padre medico condotto accompagnò lei bambina in campagna per un intervento in emergenza.

Carly says

Not my cup of tea. Have you ever read something where the overwhelming, thinks-it's-invisible-but-isn't whiteness makes you feel suffocated by the narrowness of it all? That is how this collection made me feel.

I quit around the 200-page mark, but I'm writing a review anyway because, damn it, is why. There are characters of color in this collection, and they all serve as either a) exotic curiosities to aesthetically please and interest the emotionally-vacant protagonist (e.g. "What the Ax Forgets the Tree Remembers"; "The Golden Swan"); or b) one-dimensional shorthand for the white protagonist's journey toward worldliness, or self-awareness, or whatever (e.g. also "What the Ax Forgets the Tree Remembers"; "Her Cousin Jamie") [or c) an excuse for the author to use the racist term "blackie" - several times in one collection? Someone is fixated.]

To be frank, I quit reading this book because life is just too short and there are too many other books I have to read before I die to waste time on a collection that really, to me, felt soulless. And bland, when it wasn't being otherwise callous and short-sighted.

I gave it two stars, rather than one, because I rather liked the story "Puck."

Rebecca says

I don't know what it is with me lately, but I seem to lack staying power with story collections. I read the first

40% of Pearlman's most recent book on my Kindle and then just felt no need to continue. You could consider that a virtue of story collections: you can read as much or as little at a time as you want and pick and choose what bits interest you, in a way that you can't with novels. Or you could say an author must be doing something wrong if a reader doesn't long to keep turning the pages.

At any rate, I enjoyed Pearlman's stories well enough. They all apparently take place in suburban Boston and many consider unlikely romances. My favorite was "Castle 4," set in an old hospital. Zephyr, an anesthetist, falls in love with a cancer patient, while a Filipino widower who works as a security guard forms a tender relationship with the gift shop lady who sells his disabled daughter's wood carvings. I also liked "Tenderfoot," in which a pedicurist helps an art historian see that his heart is just as hard as his feet and that may be why he has an estranged wife. "Blessed Harry" amused me because the setup is a bogus e-mail requesting that a Latin teacher come speak at King's College London (where I used to work). Two stories in a row (four in total, I'm told) center around Rennie's antique shop – a little too Mitford quaint for me. I'd gladly try something else by the author, though.

Favorite lines: "Happiness lengthens time. Every day seemed as long as a novel. Every night a double feature. Every week a lifetime, a muted lifetime, a lifetime in which sadness, always wedged under her breast like a doorstep, lost some of its bite." (from "Stone")

Originally published on my blog, Bookish Beck.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

Pearlman is a good writer, I just set these aside when they weren't on the National Book Award shortlist. I'd still recommend her!

David says

My only regret about this book is having read it all at one go, rather than doling out these stories as little treats between other books, as there is so much richness here that as beautifully poised as these stories are, the whole experience winds up being a bit cloying by the end. This one begs a return journey, but suffice it to say these are among the best short stories I've read.

Abby says

Where has Edith Pearlman been all our reading lives? Right down the road in Brookline, Massachusetts, turning out sparkling gems of short stories that are filled with strikingly intimate observation and precise language and that capture a life and a world in just a phrase. This is Pearlman's fifth collection -- she is now near eighty -- and she was little known until the last one, *Binocular Vision*, was showered with prizes. Better late than never.

The lives of four young women are shaped by a parlor game as the mother of one of them has them pick from a hat the names of the men they will marry, assuring them that men are "interchangeable" and they will be "happy enough." The headmistress of a girls' school, pregnant with her married lover's child, tries to help

his daughter, a brilliant and desperately ill anorexic. A middle-aged real estate agent, contemplating a second marriage that will secure her financial future, is shaken by what she finds in the chaotic home of an annoying neighbor.

Many of these characters who have known loss and disappointment have learned to adjust their expectations, have found that they can indeed be "happy enough" as they navigate complex relationships and surprising turns. Edith Pearlman is generous to her characters, gives them the gift of quiet determination and moments of grace.

If you love short stories, read these. If you don't read short stories because you think only a novel can deliver the satisfaction of fully developed characters you care about and stories that stay with you, read these.
