



Married Love and Other Stories

Tessa Hadley

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A new collection of short fiction from the acclaimed novelist, short story writer, and regular New Yorker contributor-"a supremely perceptive writer of formidable skill and intelligence" (New York Times Book Review)

"Hadley is a writer of exceptional intelligence and skill and . . . a subtly subversive talent. . . . [Only Alice Munro and Colm Toibin] are so adept at portraying whole lives in a few thousand words. With Married Love, Hadley joins their company as one of the most clear-sighted chroniclers of contemporary emotional journeys." -Edmund Gordon, The Guardian

A girl haunts the edges of her parents' party; a film director drops dead, leaving his film unfinished and releasing his wife to a new life; an eighteen-year-old insists on marrying her music professor, then finds herself shut out from his secrets; three friends who were intimate as teenagers meet up again after the death of the women who brought them together. Ranging widely across generations and classes, and evoking a world that expands beyond the pages, these are the stories of Tessa Hadley's astonishing new collection.

On full display are the qualities for which Tessa Hadley has long been praised: her unflinching examination of family relationships; her humor, warmth and psychological acuity; her powerful, precise and emotionally dense prose. In this collection there are domestic dramas, generational sagas, wrenching love affairs and epiphanies-captured and distilled to remarkable effect. Married Love is a collection to treasure, a masterful new work from one of today's most accomplished storytellers.

Married Love and Other Stories Details

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Author : Tessa Hadley

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From Reader Review Married Love and Other Stories for online ebook

Roger Brunyate says

Ellipses...

One of the twelve stories in the middle of Tessa Hadley's evocative collection contains a scene in which two people unexpectedly go to bed together. Standard fare for a short-story writer, you might think, but this comes as a surprise. Certainly not because it is graphic—the essential action is offstage—but because Hadley is generally assiduous in avoiding the game-changing moment. A cover quote compares her to Chekhov, though her understated Englishness has no place for muted Slavic hysteria. But she is similar in her penchant for slightly sad comedy and interest in those parts of life in which nothing heroic really happens. She is a master of the poetics of possibility.

Not that her characters do not have sex; they do, but that is seldom what interests her. Here is the beginning of one story, "In the Cave":

After the sex, he fell asleep. That wasn't what Linda had expected. Cheated—returned too soon into her own possession—she lay pinned for a while under his flung arm.

The rest of the story is about Linda getting quietly washed and dressed (maybe to return, maybe not), but Hadley manages to bring two whole lives into the picture and, from one or two tiny details, to hint at basic philosophies on which relationships can thrive or founder. Her gifts as a writer do not show in rich descriptions but in emotional perception; "returned too soon into her own possession" is a marvelous phrase, and quietly devastating.

"In the Country," one of the longer stories, begins with the kind of premise you might expect from Penelope Lively: two family photographs, taken a year apart, with only minor differences between them. The story recalls the weekend at the house in the country when the earlier portrait was taken; there is little drama, just the ordinary interactions of a four-generation family; but the reader is waiting to find out which of the differences in the photos will indeed turn out to be minor, and which significant.

But generally the stories are more open-ended than Lively's. The title tale begins with a music student announcing to her parents that she is getting married to a much older (and much married) professor, but it is less the event that matters, so much as what it will come to reveal of the dynamics of marriages in general, whether failed, successful, or merely tolerable. Another story has two lovers from university visiting each other's parents, encountering differences in lifestyle and expectations. Again, there are no surprises, just questions and reflections. Four of the stories concern people who knew each other as children or adolescents; no buried secrets or ticking time-bombs; the point is simply the ways in which people move on.

Earlier this year, in *A Possible Life*, Sebastian Faulks wrote a series of stories in which significant events are followed by long lives in which very little happens; I found his afterstories often more moving than the dramas that preceded them. So I was well primed to appreciate Tessa Hadley, for whom the true story lies less in events than the ellipses between them... connecting a few exquisitely observed moments... to the rest of life....

Gloria says

I am so glad I discovered Tessa Hadley. One of my new favorite authors. My only issue, as with *Bad Dreams*, was that some stories weren't quite... long enough. They seemed to end just a bit too soon, a little suddenly. But they were so good. Sooo good.

Sonya says

Most of these stories are set in contemporary Britain, about people with normal lives. What separates them from the mundane is Tessa Hadley's ability to fully animate the setting and the interior lives of her characters. She knows how to eke out details that are necessary to the whole, and to the story's overall effect and tone.

My favorite is "In the Country," where Julie is Ed's wife. They gather with Ed's family at the country house to celebrate Ed's mother's sixtieth birthday. Julie has a sort of love for the family, but always feels like an outsider, and she consciously holds back things about herself from them to maintain a level of reserve. It's not clear if this is for self-protection or to maintain a sense of self that she feels she might lose if she were to reveal it.

Without giving too much away, Julie shares a secret about her past with someone, and she does it not with just words that describe her memories, but with a sort of pantomime. She shows the character the way she dressed by putting cloth on her head, shows him the way she held her hands while she was praying, and then reveals more. There is a pulse in the story, summed up by the line, "The understanding came to her that these alternating moods were two pulses in life, opposite and yet related, like the expansion and contraction of a heartbeat: one diffusing sensation and sending it flying apart, this one gathering it in the living centre."

Penny says

This has reaffirmed that I really am not sure about short stories - I am still deceived by the shortness and fail to see the significance of the succinct phrases and use of words, I am left wanting to know what happens next. This was an interesting dip into various scenarios of married love, interesting but still making me feel as though I was skipping through them blindly.

Diane S ? says

These are very literary stories, and Hadley does a great job of noticing even the minutiae in the lives of her characters. She brings the readers attention to their surroundings and follows their lives longer than many short story writer do. Of course I had favorites and a few I could not relate to, but as a whole I enjoyed these stories of relationships good and bad. ARC from publisher

Bettie? says

Starts 5.11.2012

Nicely written.

Candice says

Liked this, although not as much as the novel *Clever Girl* that i just finished. Nothing negative about the short stories, but I think the development of the characters in the novel was more satisfying, so I have another one of her novels to read next. I can see some of the seeds of her *Clever Girl* characters in these stories, however.

Martha says

Tessa Hadley is a master story teller and this collection is a gem. I savored each story, but was especially smitten with *Journey Home* and *She's the One*, both of which presented situations that were very satisfying emotional journeys. There's a certain economy to these stories that keep them quite separate from a novel or something that could become a novel. But in that economy, more has to be told, and the intensity of this telling gives these stories a fullness of life that is dense and moving. Most of these stories have portents of disaster that never seem to come to fruition. The author very cleverly plants an idea in her reader's head, then allows her characters to side step whatever terrible thing we might imagine for them, and it is this quality that makes them so real and like so many of us ordinary people who try to beat back a bad idea before it runs us off the rails. It is this control of the potential for drama that brings these stories to life, that makes them ring true.

Bonnie says

'He knew how passionately she succumbed to the roles she dreamed up for herself. She won't be able to get out of this one, he thought. She can't stop now.'

Married Love: And Other Stories is a collection of short fictional contemporary stories. *Married Love* is not all about domestic bliss. It's about the every day struggles that the characters encounter. Each story is a showcasing of a brief moment that manages to convey an entire life without leaving one feeling incomplete by the shortness of it.

'For a moment, however, she could imagine the sensation of chewing politely and suffering on a mouthful of broken crystal, tasting salty blood.'

Reviewing a collection of short stories is always difficult. Do you review each one individually? Do you rate them as a whole? All in all, the characters within her stories are strongly written and despite the fact that I certainly preferred a few more than others they all managed to shine in their own way. Her writing was stately and succinct and quite enjoyable. My interest has definitely been piqued and I would love to read more from this author.

'I couldn't help being swept along by the idea of someone changing who she was: I knew I wasn't capable of this; I was just helplessly forever me.'

RH Walters says

Reading these stories makes me feel like I'm crouching over a dollhouse and everything Hadley does with the people fascinates me.

Michelle says

I love a strong short story collection - it's one of my favorite genres. This one didn't do it for me, though the writing is strong. As I've written in oh-so-many reviews lately, my work situation right now is quite hideous so it is possible I am unable to "get into" any story as my mind is too busy stressing out about other things. I think I need something highly plotty because the last few I've read have me feeling antsy and distracted. As I look back the ones I've rated not strongly are all low on plot. So likely a problem of the reader, not the writer.

A. says

Hadley does a beautiful job of capturing the everyday aspects of people's lives. The quotidian becomes dramatic in her hands. I appreciate how deftly her stories are plotted and how succinctly her characters are drawn.

Perhaps the simplest story in the book is Journey Home and yet it reveals all of Hadley's strengths. Alec, an art historian, is headed home from Venice. When the story begins he is mildly concerned about his sister because she changed her relationship status on facebook. As he takes one last look at his favorite works of art before heading out of the city, his concerns gradually intensifies. The reader picks up a few more salient details included that she tried to commit suicide seven years earlier. When Alec is stuck in the Paris airport and his sister still hasn't responded to his calls or texts he really begins to fret. The tension builds beautifully as Hadley slowly unwinds the story and gives out nuggets of the siblings' history. I won't give away the ending, but she absolutely nails it.

I loved the stories Married Love, A Mouthful of Cut Glass, and She's the One. There's not a failure in this book but a few not radiate as strongly as the others.

Maartje says

No stories here. Just random fragments of uninteresting characters' lives. Not a shred of dramatic development. Boring, flat and tedious.

Julie says

Hadley's writing is so entrancing; I loved every one of these short stories. She takes familiar themes

(marriage, family, divorce, death, parenting) and illuminates them with wisdom and heart and verve. Like her novel *The Past*, which my book club read together, this collection is full of characters who fully engage the reader, sentences that you have to read and re-read just for the pleasure of their construction, and simple plots that are completely relatable because the events they depict are realistic and meaningful.

As an aside, one of the best passages is from the short story "She's the One"; this author understands readers and their passion for the written word. I've read few better descriptions of what a book can mean to a reader:

"Ally read novels wrapped up in her duvet beside the central-heating radiator in her bedroom, borrowing them from the centre and the public library, sometimes finishing one and starting another without even changing her position or getting up to make coffee, like an addict. She knew this wasn't the right kind of reading. Studying for her literature degree, she had learned how to analyze the words and the themes; she had worked dutifully on her essay style, imitating academic articles. She imagined the reading she did now as like climbing inside one of those deep old beds she'd seen in a museum, with a sliding door to close behind you: even as she was suffering with a book and could hardly bear it, felt as if her heart would crack with emotion or with outrage at injustice, the act of reading it enclosed and saved her. Sometimes when she moved back out of the book and into her own life, just for a moment she could see her circumstances with new interest and clarity, as if they were happening to someone else."

I'm not a regular reader of short stories, but these definitely made me want to read more of Hadley's impressive body of work. Highly recommended.

Morgan Schulman says

Like most books of literally short stories, some are amazing and some are just tedious. If you've already read all the good ones in the *New Yorker*, don't bother; if not, get it from The library and read selectively. The three star rating is an average because there are a few five star stories in here.
