



When the Messenger Is Hot

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Features the stories of women recovering from loss, addiction, or betrayal, from a woman who decides to live on the patio rooftop of her friend's apartment, to a writer whose identity is compromised by the actress who portrays her, to a daughter who believes her mother is still alive. Readers' Guide

When the Messenger Is Hot Details

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Kristen says

All of her stories take the tone of a gossipy friend, telling you her latest troubles over a couple tall cups of Starbucks' best. Some stories suffer from too many cow patties, some from a structure little better than a fleshed-out list. Crane's sentences run on and on. Taking her all in one chunk tried my patience some, unless it was a really charming or compelling story, i.e., "Privacy and Coffee," "Year-at-a-Glance," "Christina" and "Something Shiny," which was about a girl who wrote her memoirs. Then Hollywood wanted to make them into a movie. Then the actress hired to play the author came to study her habits and mannerisms. Great fun.

Pamela says

Elizabeth Crane has that thing all writers wish for: a distinctive voice. In this volume (I'm eager to get to her three others), it's caffeinated, deliriously self-conscious, and strangely buoyant. I wouldn't necessarily want to be the young women in these tales--they are by and large confused, directionless, and not so lucky in love--but boy do I like to listen to them. Many of the stories in the collection are deceptively light and comic, but wrap up with a dark, rich note that takes the reader someplace deeper. Others (including one of my favorites, "Year-at-a-Glance," which deals with a mother's terminal illness) are heartbreakers all the way through. Apart from "Year-at-a-Glance," my biggest thumbs-up go to "The Archetype's Girlfriend," "The Super Fantastic New Zealand Triangle," "An Intervention," and the delightful, brief, savage "Good for You!" Some of these stories contain magical elements, but Crane makes one feel that the magic isn't any weirder or harder to believe in than the tricks our ordinary mental life plays on us.

Miss says

okay folks LISTEN

i wanna figure out what it's like to be an adult

not like have a job, pay bills, figure out how to make a meal type adult, i'm already stumbling my way through that

but like. i wanna talk about HOUSE PROJECTS and my neighbour susan who is always adding things to her lawn, it drives me mad and how barry over in finance just got married for the third time, isn't it WILD and property taxes are so HORRIBLE and also have you tried the car dealership on wilson avenue, i got a .5% five year financing on my car, and last week i was at book club with ellen and our book was just such a powerful glimpse at the foibles of modern life, so quirky and funny, i absolutely DIED at the story about madame rochau's young paramour, it was an utter GAS

anyways i don't know how to do most of that stuff but i figure i could start with the books? i'm good with books. books are cool. so i'm gonna read this book because the summary doesn't describe the story at all but does namedrop some newspapers and i feel like that means it probably has no spaceships or magic and lots of scenes of people eating dinner and that seems like the kind of thing ellen at book club would read, you know?

Jillian says

Okay, so I am between one and two stars for this review...It's not that this wasn't entertaining--it was in some places. Definitely a beach read book. Requires very little attention. I guess I'll choose a one star rating because I really didn't like Crane's portrayal of women--they came across as helpless, unable to see their own faults, all making stupid decisions (primarily about men), and lacking self-awareness. This would be okay for a couple of stories, but it seemed like it was the formula that happened in every story, and by the mid-point of the book, I was ready to shake the characters....and then I just found myself annoyed with everyone and rolling my eyes.

gwen g says

Elizabeth Crane is just hitting my sweet spot right now -- I haven't allowed myself much fiction since I started school and am trying to read about reference services before I fall asleep, but I cracked on the long bus ride to and from NYC.

When the Messenger is Hot felt like a continuation of All This Heavenly Glory to me, although Crane wrote Messenger first and I'm sure it Glory felt that way to people who read them in the right order. Both books have the same breathlessness, the same introspective and semi-self-obsessed themes, the same connected stories written by narrators that it's hard not to assume are Crane herself, the same play with stream-of-consciousness language and punctuation. I love it.

An example from "Proposal," a story about getting rid of Valentine's Day:

So that is my proposal, that we take this day and call up our people and we send them cards that are made out of whatever, and we tell them things, we can just say, Hey, hey, you, if we can't think of anything else, or if we are not the type of people to tell our friends we love them, you know, openly. Or we can even go ahead and tell them cheesy things if we are the type of people who like cheesy things as long as we make up the cheesy things ourselves, we can tell them why we're glad they're alive and tell them to call us tomorrow and say they're okay. Because otherwise my best hope is that years from now, when these people who have lost people meet new people, when they get new valentines and new champagne and roses and proposals and Vegas weddings, that this day will at best rise to the level of bittersweet. (145-6)

Harriet M. says

I really liked Crane's second collection of stories, All This Heavenly Glory, but these stories were neither differentiated enough nor linked enough to be as satisfying as her second book. Most of the stories here deal with, at least in passing, a dead/dying mother and rehab and all feature the same kind of breathless narration and quirky interpolation of odd details and supernatural elements. It was a little too much of the same for me (I had a similar reaction when reading all of John Irving's books-- one is really unique and interesting, but after a while they all feel like they're the same book). "Year-at-a-glance" is one I'd definitely recommend and read again. It was the simplest and most eloquent of the stories about the dying mother, which I can only assume is drawn from Crane's own experience (the book is dedicated "for Mom, in memory). Here the

breathless voice is harnessed as a sort of survival mechanism, its frenetic pace suggesting a thinly disguised grief and dismay.

Tracy says

I bought this in a train station while I was there by myself, in hopes that reading something chick-lit would help focus my nerves. The collection itself isn't so bad, but it was a little bland for me. They are mostly just general short fiction tales, with some "fantasy" elements, like in the story "Return From the Depot!" how a woman's mother comes back from the dead three years after she died, explaining that it was a mix-up at some bus station in limbo. Then there's the title story, which is about a woman who wants to sleep with this hot guy who won't let her because he keeps spouting things about faith. Then there's another story with that has "fucking" in its title about a woman who dates a guy who likes to only use the word "fuck" as a sexual thing and insists that dark chocolate is the best thing in the world. So it's varied. Good thing to read when you are waiting for a plane or a train or such though.

Kelly says

Elizabeth Crane's prose is smart yet straightforward, funny yet meaningful. In *When the Messenger Is Hot*, she experiments with form and point of view while creating memorable characters and scenarios.

There are lots of stories in this book, so I'll just highlight a couple of my favorites. The opener, "The Archetypes Girlfriend," is more of an extended description than a traditional story. Is there such thing as a stereotypical idiosyncrasy? Yes: Crane manages to display tons of them as she hilariously examines several personas of women who get under the skin of vulnerable men. Another standout is "Christina," in which the narrator encounters a dancing ghost baby in her home who she chats with on a day to day basis.

The main thing that makes this book short of spectacular is its repetitious themes. Which isn't automatically bad...it's just that she exhausts them through the stories. The death of a mother, dating debacles, and the habitat comparison of Chicago vs. New York became predictable. The stories could have been presented freshly without incorporating these same ideas over and over again. It made the stories feel overly autobiographical--like the writer was having a difficult time detaching herself from every character she created.

Julia says

I just walked into a random used bookstore in Bayview and found this. What are the odds?

I liked these well enough. They were an extremely quick read- I read most of it during a session on the stationary bike. I still have to read the story with "New Zealand" in the title. The stories were warm and cute, although "Christina" and "Return from the Depot!" reminded me a little too much of the American suburban magic realism that Douglas Coupland has tried so many times to mostly very annoying results. I read this right after finishing *Anagrams*, and that might have been a strange frame of mind - it's just similar enough, but with crucial differences in outlook and tone.

Maggie says

Elizabeth Crane has such a beautiful mind.

Seth says

Son-of-a-gun. It turns out that finding a book that is written in a voice that is just like that of all of your favorite ex-girlfriends at their most clever, funny, and sophisticated is oddly enjoyable.

Aaron says

"Intervention" just might be my favorite story in this collection. In Crane's story, a woman joins A.A. even though she is not an alcoholic and believes that she has found fulfillment in the organization's teachings. What she has actually done is make a horrid mess of her life and her friends step in to correct her ways.

It's a very funny and relatable story.

Every story in this collection is relatable and funny.

Favorites include:

"Privacy and Coffee" in which a woman inexplicably decides to take up residence on the roof of her best friend's apartment building.

"Something Shiny" chronicles a best-selling memoirist who sells the screenplay rights to Hollywood. She invites the actress playing her into her home and then slowly watches as the actress takes over her life, until the memoirist, in fact, no longer exists.

"Return From The Depot!", about a daughter convinced that her mother has returned from the grave and is now the star of a hit television series about the ordeal. She is also now married to Alan Thicke. This story is similar in tone and conceit to "Christina" in which a lonely woman has conversations with the ghost of a baby who died in her apartment. I mention them both together because they are very similar, but they are both equally good.

"Josie and Hyman Differ in Their Use of the Word 'Fuck'" in which a young lady finds her boyfriend to be an elitist piece of shit, but doesn't have the balls to say so.

It's a bizarre batch of stories. But I enjoyed them a great deal. I am reminded sometimes of David Foster Wallace in her use of run-on sentences, footnotes, and humor. But she isn't as overwhelmingly pretentious as Wallace can be. Elizabeth Crane is David Foster Wallace for people who want a little more accessibility.

Highly recommended.

Jamie says

The author has a unique voice, but sadly the stories don't. They're all told by what might as well be the same character, and what might very well be half a step away from the author herself. OK, collections like that can still be good, but this one was just all right. The stories are mildly entertaining and a few are written in a mildly unusual style, but I'm struggling to find anything better to say about these stories. The book is a very quick read, solicits little thought, and doesn't leave the reader with much, if anything to ponder. All that said, it's not *bad*. It's just nothing special.

Nikki Morse says

I liked one or two stories at the end, enough that I almost thought about another star. But I read the rest of the book in one day just so that I could be done with it and move on.

Amy says

I kinda feel like I know everything Elizabeth Crane can do now, which is disappointing. Reading this book of short stories after reading her novel (that I didn't like much) and her other book of short stories (which I loved) felt like checking off boxes. Fun little surreal stories? Check. References to dead opera singer mom? Check, check, check. References to alcoholism? Check, check....and we're done. I kept waiting to be surprised again, like I was with "You Must Be This Happy to Enter," or at least to hear a slightly different narrative voice emerge at some point, but that didn't happen with this book. Alas.
