



Inside Madeleine

Paula Bomer

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From the author of *Nine Months* and *Baby* comes a daring new collection that seethes with alienation, lust and rage. Bomer takes us from hospitals, halfway houses, and alleyways, to boarding schools and Park Avenue penthouses, exploring the complex relationships girls have with their bodies, with other girls, and with boys. The title novella tracks the ins and outs of an outsider's life: her childhood obesity and kinky sex life, her toxic relationships, whether familial or erotic, and her various disappearing acts, of body and mind.

Inside Madeleine Details

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From Reader Review Inside Madeleine for online ebook

Jessie says

Dark, smutty, and unflinching. Bomer is able to capture some of the slipperiest, most convoluted emotions with dagger-precise turns of phrase. No one writes "bad" girls better.

Richard Thomas says

Wow. One of the most compelling authors out there today, she takes so many chances on the pages, isn't afraid of the taboo or controversial. A fantastic collection of stories.

Andrea says

These stories made me squirm with discomfort. I've felt this way before when I read Kevin Sampsell and Lindsay Hunter. Reading these stories inspired a state of horrified fascination. And I loved it.

Dawn says

I've loved Paula Bomer for three and a half years and I don't think I'll ever stop. The unholy triumvirate (aka my top three favorite stories): *Breasts*, *Inside Madeleine*, and *Outsiders*.

Alisha Dunn says

This collection of stories was engaging, horrifying, and unflinchingly grotesque. The girls who we read about are desperate. Their lives are not pretty, and the author does not try to hide that fact--she does the exact opposite and shoves it directly into the reader's face. Most of the characters are not very likable, but the emotional trauma that each is dealing with is relatable. Even if you have nothing in common with these girls they seem like people you could have crossed paths with in everyday life. They are each heartbreakingly real in some way.

I really enjoyed how honest and unfiltered the writing was. It was interesting reading something so vulgar and yet so engaging. Some of the stories pissed me off. Some made me sad. Some left me wondering what it was that I was feeling. Each story was full of emotion although that emotion was usually negative in some way. I liked some stories more than others, but each story made me feel something, and for me, that is a sign of good writing.

Tiffany says

I can see the potential in the themes, but it just didn't work for me.

Though the subject/content is interesting, this entire collection lacks grip in its entirety (energy, language, and storytelling). For each story, there is nothing new about the characters either, think of the main characters from *The Bell Jar*, *The Virgin Suicides*, etc., spread all over then mixed together, void of their personalities and wittiness.

Ela says

I just didn't get it....

Bob Lopez says

Oof. For the most part, it felt like a collection of stories written by someone trying to piss off their parents, or an adolescent trying to convince everyone that they hate themselves, a collection that uses taboo as a shortcut to edginess. Read it based on the Loren Stein blurb and will henceforward take his blurbs and recommendations w/ a grain of salt.

Autumn says

Sorry, I just don't see where the accolades for "Inside Madeleine" are coming from. Just because it's a female writing about sex in a less than Harlequin way doesn't mean what's written is automatically gritty and subversive. To be honest, it was just plain boring.

Dev Singer says

This is the first book I've read where the characters aren't mostly happy with a few problems. No one leads a happy life here. The problems displayed in the stories take over the characters' lives. There are no easy resolutions.

This book is graphic. Graphic drug and alcohol use. Graphic sex. One short story is definitely erotica. The title novella could be defined as pulp fiction, maybe - while sex is not the point of the story, there is a whole lot of it.

I liked it. I liked the fact that there was no sugarcoating. And - as much as I hate to say it, this book made me feel a little bit better about myself. Nothing I've had to deal with in my life has ever come close to the problems these girls have to face.

Thelma Adams says

Paula Bomer's collection of stories and a novella is fierce, funny and filthy. The author of "Baby" and "Nine Months" is not your people-pleasing fiction writer. Her prose is crisp and clear and propulsive but she never pauses to ask: is it pretty? Do you like me? Some of her characters may be doormats seeking and thwarting unconditional love but, as an author, Bomer is brave, often mortifyingly so. Some of these stories are so naked emotionally that they cry out to be covered up with a towel – but Bomer resists, documenting every stretch mark, every gooey sex act, every human hunger. The stories and novella are about adolescents and young women who screw, drink, smoke and suffer toward some sense of identity, and a final nugget of unexpected emotional truth, but they are never blamers. They are fat girls and slim, workers in halfway houses and inmates, college girls tied at the hip to the party keg and Friday night ice skaters slugging back peppermint schnapps, daddy's girls and mommy's enemies. They sometimes echo each other, circling geography in South Bend, Indiana, or Boston, Massachusetts, or the East Village of Manhattan, struggling with anorexia and love-drug addiction. My favorite story is called "Pussies," about a doormat of a young college graduate, all angles and jangly limbs and drunk more often than not. Her relationship with a trust-fund fueled girlfriend goes south when an apartment building catches fire and she rescues the girl's cats but in a desperate survivor's way that alienates the vegan rich girl (but spares the animals). The Madeleine of the title, and main character in the novella that concludes the slim volume, is a Midwestern "Precious," a fat girl whose folds of skin both fascinate her and protect her from a world that continually serves up rejection. These are not dainty stories to be read one at a time. Instead, binge-drink them for the shock value – and stay for the awe.

Jaclyn says

The strength of this collection is how one story bleeds into the next. Each story contains echoes of the previous stories but not in a distracting way. The stories build and build. Bomer has a skill for evoking physical reactions and I found myself holding my breath or cringing at several points in the stories. The women are not always brave or self-respecting but the emotions created are captivating. These are stories about identity and coming of age and being/becoming a woman. "Reading to the Blind Girl" is a perfect example. The protagonist, Maggie, volunteers to read to a blind girl in her class at Boston University but soon discovers she is repulsed by the blind girl. Even though Maggie wants to do the right thing, she is figuring out who she is, what she wants and her sense of duty to this young woman in her class is overwhelmed by her own realistic, selfish desire to stake a claim about who she is. These themes of identity and struggle between who the character thinks she is and who she wants to be are the times when Bomer's writing really shines.

The novella and title story, "Inside Madeleine," at first appears to be the perfect capstone to these themes and at the beginning of the story, Bomer is on a roll. Madeleine's constant struggle to fill herself up is expertly described in scenes and details with her mother's cooking and her mother's anguish over her daughter being obese. Bomer continues this as Madeleine attempts to 'fill herself up' in other ways in scenes that are heart-breaking and unflinching. However, when we get half-way through and Madeleine no longer wants to fill herself up, Bomer switches to telling the story from Madeleine's interior to the neglect of creating great scenes like she had in the first half. I wanted more scenes because the author telling me what was going on with Madeleine was not as interesting as watching it and figuring it out for myself.

This is a great collection even though the end left me wanting. Still, I look forward to reading what Bomer

comes up with next.

Naomi says

...that was unpleasant. Not badly written, but just one awful fucked-up girl after another--except they were all about the same girl, all the stories starring the friend who adores her friend but that friend doesn't really like her back, starring girls who fuck everyone and feel shitty about it, starring girls who smoke pot all the time. Every story. None of those things are bad or make for bad stories! But it was the same character over and over, doing basically the same stuff in the same neighborhood in Boston, and it was... pretty viscerally unpleasant.

Marian says

I really disliked this collection of short stories. Often movies fall flat because the characters face simple problems that are tidily resolved, leaving a state of unrealistic bliss. These short stories suffered from a contradictory problem--everything was so bleak! By no means do I feel that fiction shouldn't be depressing. However, good fiction captures an essence about the complexity of life. "Madame Bovary", which I adore, is not exactly a cheerful read. But the pain of "Madame Bovary" is understandable, and helps us to understand the human conditions of the stifling oppression of mundane provincial life. By contrast, the stories of "Inside Madeline" do not capture this complexity; the protagonists suffer inveterate misery without the necessary characterization to explain why they are miserable. Each story is set in 1986 and focuses on essentially the same unhappy girl from South Bend, Indiana. In one of the stories the girl is living in Boston during a summer between her college years, and she's working at a home for mentally disturbed patients. The girl is troubled by the fact that her mother hates her, while she is close with her father. These relationships affect her ability to interact with others. While these family relationships are interesting, there is an utter absence of characterization to explain why. To make the reader care, or empathize, it's necessary to know more than the unsatisfactory statement that "the mother hates the daughter". The reader doesn't need the causes of the bad relationship explicitly spelled out (that would be artificially pat), but a nuanced suggestion is necessary. My final critique: this short story collection was so similar to "Blueprints for Building Better Girls" by Elissa Schappell, which I read recently, and also disliked.

James says

An exceptional book on par with Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, only unflinchingly updated for our time. Exploring all the struggles, pleasures, horrors, and disappointments of girls becoming young women becoming old women too soon, Bomer crafts stories so true you wouldn't blink if someone told you they were nonfiction essays by walking talking broken healed astounding and confounding women living in your town. Worth a spot on any bookshelf.
