



Bad Dreams and Other Stories

Tessa Hadley

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The award-winning author of *The Past* once again "crystallizes the atmosphere of ordinary life in prose somehow miraculous and natural" (*Washington Post*), in a collection of stories that elevate the mundane into the exceptional.

The author of six critically acclaimed novels, Tessa Hadley has proven herself to be the champion of revealing the hidden depths in the deceptively simple. In these short stories it's the ordinary things that turn out to be most extraordinary: the history of a length of fabric or a forgotten jacket.

Two sisters quarrel over an inheritance and a new baby; a child awake in the night explores the familiar rooms of her home, made strange by the darkness; a housekeeper caring for a helpless old man uncovers secrets from his past. The first steps into a turning point and a new life are made so easily and carelessly: each of these stories illuminate crucial moments of transition, often imperceptible to the protagonists.

A girl accepts a lift in a car with some older boys; a young woman reads the diaries she discovers while housesitting. Small acts have large consequences, some that can reverberate across decades; private fantasies can affect other people, for better and worse. The real things that happen to people, the accidents that befall them, are every bit as mysterious as their longings and their dreams.

Bad Dreams and Other Stories demonstrates yet again that Tessa Hadley "puts on paper a consciousness so visceral, so fully realized, it heightens and expands your own. She is a true master" (Lily King, author of *Euphoria*).

Bad Dreams and Other Stories Details

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From Reader Review Bad Dreams and Other Stories for online ebook

Rosemary says

From the title I expected more unpleasantness, if not actual horror, in these stories, but mostly they are gentle tales of discomfort - "unhappiness" is too strong, even. Girls who feel out of place in their family but do all right when they grow up, and that kind of thing.

I see that Tessa Hadley was born in 1956 and in many cases the characters are that age - if the main character is a child the setting is the 1960s, if a young adult it's the 1970s, etc. But not all. One story is set in 1914.

The writing is wonderful and I'd love to read more stories by this writer, though they're probably best read slowly rather than all at one sitting.

Lee Monks says

By way of lazy recommendation (as well as the 5*s), after reading the opening story of Bad Dreams I immediately bought the rest of Hadley's short stories.

David says

This is the sixth of Hadley's books I've read, and up until now I had (contrary to most critical opinion) considered her a better novelist than short story writer. I enjoyed her previous two collections and they contain some memorable pieces but I wasn't wowed by them. So what a surprise to read 'Bad Dreams' and to find it (for me) her strongest book to date in either form - just a brilliantly written set of stories.

Diane S ? says

Although I have tried, several times in fact, to read Hadley's fiction, they for me never resonated. Her writing is elegant, even beautiful, but despite the top notch writing I never succeeded. Yet, from the moment I picked up this her newest book of nine short stories I was hooked. These stories I found phenomenal.

Each story contains things that make up the most mundane of lives, but there is one particular moment in each that will have an effect that changes things. Small things that have huge consequences. It is not just her writing though, it is the details she provides, little nuances that imprint these stories in the mind. Billowing curtains, mouse droppings in a tea cup, a jacket, a piece of clothing, an attic room where a budding writer is reading and creating, just small touches that reach out and grab the reader. The details that are used to set the scene, incredibly vivid.

I didn't have a favorite story, I loved them all. Usually in short stories there are one or two that are favored, so it is unusual for me to find that I loved them all. Now I wonder if I should go back and try another of her novels, maybe with a more discerning eye. I think I will.

Larry H says

I'd rate this 3.5 stars. Thanks to Diane for the inspiration to read this.

So let's get this out of the way first: contrary to what the title and the cover design of this book may lead you to believe (as it did me), this is not a collection of horror stories, or tales of the macabre. In fact, if any of the stories in this new collection cause you to have, well, bad dreams, it is because of the immensely accurate way Tessa Hadley captures everyday life and the single moments when things change.

The 10 stories in Hadley's collection are mostly about ordinary people going about their regular everyday lives. In some of the stories, one incident causes a shift for the protagonist; in others, it's a series of events. For some, the shift is felt by them alone, while for others, the shift changes the course of lives, dramatically or imperceptibly.

Some of my favorite stories included: "Flight," in which a woman tries to mend her relationship with her estranged sister while visiting their hometown in the United Kingdom; "Experience," about a lonely woman living in a borrowed house who discovers some secrets about the house's owner when she finds her diaries; "One Saturday Morning," which tells of a young girl whose parents receive an unexpected visit from an old friend who comes with sad news; "The Stain," about a housekeeper caring for an old man, who finds out some less-than-savory things about his past; "An Abduction," in which a young girl on the cusp of womanhood accepts a ride from a group of older boys; and "Silk Brocade," about a piece of, you guessed it, silk brocade fabric, and its journey throughout the years.

I have been meaning to read Hadley's work for some time, but some other book always seems to distract me. I thought reading a collection of her stories would be a good introduction to her writing style. I definitely like the way she tells stories—her characters are well-developed and intriguing, and she has a lyrical touch where imagery and setting are concerned. I definitely intend to pick up one of her novels in the near future.

The thing is, though, while I enjoyed a number of these stories, I wasn't quite sure of the point of some of them. A few of the stories seemed fairly inconsequential, and I found myself wondering if I had missed some subtle key element, or if that particular story didn't really have a purpose beyond simply, well, telling a story.

For those of you wary of short stories because you think they require more concentration and focus, I'd recommend this collection, because the stories are well-told, yet for the most part, they are uncomplicated plot-wise. I'm glad to finally read Hadley's work, and look forward to seeing her talent in long form sometime in the near future.

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blog...>

Alan says

The first story is wonderful, looking forward to the rest!

..Yes, a marvellous collection with every story brimming with exquisitely written moments. Whilst place is well evoked - Bristol, Liverpool, the Home Counties - and time - many of these stories take place in the 60s/70s (one in the 50s) with a present day coda - it is the perfect rendition of an exchange or an afternoon that captures you.

that afternoon they achieved the miraculous drunkenness you only get once or twice in a lifetime, brilliant and without consequences, not peaking and subsiding but running weightlessly on and on.. Donny Ross's pursuit of Ann was as intent and tense as a stalking cat's: invisible to everyone else, it seemed to her to flash through all the disparate, hazy successive phases of the afternoon like a sparking, dangerous live wire. They lay close together but not touching, in the long grass under a tall ginko tree... the light faded in the sky to a deep turquoise and the peacocks came to roost in the tree above them, clotted lumps of darkness, with their long tails hanging down like bell pulls.

4.5 stars. Although not quite as layered and complex, Hadley seems to me to be England's answer to Alice Munro.

Amy says

Short stories are a snippet in time to me & Hadley is a master. Decisions reverberate far into the future; while reading, one feels as if they are hanging on by a thread, about to slip into something they can't take back, should they want to. I'm eager now to read more of Hadley's work.

Michael Tweed says

Highly recommended.

Lark Benobi says

These stories are all stunning. They are exquisitely perfect. Why didn't I enjoy them more? I guess I felt they didn't need to be read, or written. These could have been written in 1980, or 1890. They follow the same tone and structure of the great stories written by writers of the naturalist school in the late 19th century (e.g. de Maupassant). This same sort of story continued to be published with frequency throughout the 20th century in the New Yorker, and on into this century (most stories in this collection were published first in The New Yorker), and however beautifully executed these stories are, I'm tired of the type.

The first story in the collection, "The Abduction," was breathtakingly well written, but I couldn't stop thinking that I'd read it before, until I realized I was thinking of Oates's "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?". "The Abduction" is like a sweeter version of the same story.

Maybe it's like saying I've eaten cheesecake so I have no need to ever eat it again, but there it is.

Sara says

This is a collection of stories about ordinary people and places and ordinary happenings, but all with a hint of mystery and deep, ruminating observation of the human experience. I like Tessa Hadley's writing style very much and there are a few stories in this collection that I really enjoyed. But overall, I was underwhelmed by this book. The stories all began to run together in my mind and some felt unfinished. This is the first I've read of Hadley's work, but I will certainly pick up something else of hers.

Kiki says

I enjoyed these short stories from Tessa Hadley. I've read a couple of her novels, and especially loved *The Past* which I've recommended to many customers at work. It seemed a natural transition from Hunt's *The Dark Dark* to these more grounded but equally meaningful stories of women of all ages and walks of life. Both collections hold a truth at their kernel that life is often dangerous for women.

Rebecca Foster says

When I think of Tessa Hadley's books, I picture a certain quality of light. I see piercing yellow shafts of sunlight filling airy, wood-floored rooms and lowering over suburban English gardens to create languid summer evenings. I think of childhood's sense of possibility and adolescence's gently scary feeling of new freedoms opening up. And, even when the story lines are set in the present day, I imagine the calm sophistication of 1950s–70s fashions: smart sweater sets and skirts, or flowing hippie dresses. Perhaps that's why "Deeds Not Words," about a suffragette, seemed like the weakest story here. I also think of Hadley as a master of third-person omniscience, so although "Experience" features one of her typical young women protagonists, the first-person narration threw me a bit.

I can hardly find fault with any of the other eight stories in this collection, though. I loved the significance that certain memories and objects take on: a grand house left to a cleaner in a will, a scarf passed between sisters, a bit of silk brocade repurposed after decades. Several stories spotlight childhood moments, like seeing one's mother dancing with a widower on a balcony ("One Saturday Morning"), playing a nighttime prank ("Bad Dreams"), or sinking into melodramatic Victorian novels on holiday in France ("Her Share of Sorrow"). I also like how the first and last stories end with a postscript showing how the passing of 20 or 30 years changes – or doesn't change – things: Jane can't forget the odd summer afternoon when she lost her virginity, though the bloke doesn't remember the incident at all ("An Abduction").

I've read Hadley's four most recent books, and on this evidence she just keeps getting better and better. Her eye is so sharp on the child's psychology, the way families work, how relationships fall apart, and how memories form and linger as we age. If you've not read her before, I would commend her work to you. (See also: *Clever Girl* and *The Past*.)

Here's some passages that convey that atmosphere I was talking about in my first paragraph:

"It was a lovely evening, very still. The house filled up with the smell of meat stewing slowly in wine. Slanting yellow light, thick with dancing midges, pooled under the horse chestnuts outside. The floor-length sash windows were thrown up in the lounge, and after the guests had finished eating they came upstairs to sit there in the twilight, smoking and drinking."

"Outside her bedroom window it grew dark, and the ordinary landscape of smart back gardens and pergolas and trampolines receded; an extraordinary huge moon, the colour of yellow cream, rose into the turquoise sky and seemed to be dissolving into an aureole of light around its rim."

"And somehow that afternoon they achieved the miraculous drunkenness you only get once or twice in a lifetime, brilliant and without consequences, not peaking and subsiding but running weightlessly on and on."

Sarah says

3.5 rounded up

Some really good stories here, but I think I most liked the way Tessa Hadley's keen observations of people's behaviour come across in her writing: the way the people in these stories react to things, their actions, their motives - all felt very real (and at times, totally relatable). Will be checking out more of her books for sure!

Victoria Sadler says

This was an interesting one as I adored this collection of rather dark short stories though I wasn't a fan of *The Past*, the last full-length novel by Tessa I read. And I know why it worked out this way.

Tessa's languid, unsettling prose is intoxicating. It feels almost like dreamscape, like we're in a place that is this world but something a bit out of the ordinary. Her descriptive language and her ability to capture moments in the dark underbelly of unhappy middle class lives is wonderful. However, such a style didn't work for me over 300+ pages as the narrative drive can get a bit lost. But give Tessa a shorter scene to draw and, wow! What a result.

Tessa's book is very much UK-based; it has that sense of Britishness about it that's so easy to identify – suppressed emotions at dinner parties, estranged sisters attempting an awkward reunion – but it also has some interesting explorations of sexuality and repressed emotions with stories of brief abductions of young girls, and a carer uncovering the hidden past of an elderly man she attends to. Tessa's style really suits these snatched scenes. Atmospheric and surprising.

Nicole says

Tessa Hadley is a god.
