



Portraits of a Few of the People I've Made Cry

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The ten stories in this striking debut collection examine the perils of love and what it means to live during an era when people will offer themselves, almost unthinkingly, to strangers. Risks and repercussions are never fully weighed. People leap and almost always land on rocky ground. May-December romances flourish in these stories, as do self-doubt and, in many cases, serious regret. Mysterious, dangerous benefactors, dead and living artists, movie stars and college professors, plagiarists, and distinguished foreign novelists are among the many different characters. No one is blameless, but villains are difficult to single out—everyone seemingly bears responsibility for his or her desires and for the outcome of difficult choices so often made hopefully and naively.

Portraits of a Few of the People I've Made Cry Details

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Author : Christine Sneed

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From Reader Review Portraits of a Few of the People I've Made Cry for online ebook

Susan Nusser says

Christine Sneed captures how, even when nothing huge happens between two people, their relationship causes lasting impact on their lives, even if the relationship doesn't last. Her characters are smart, funny and knowing, and yet still seem to be taken by surprise by their own emotional potential.

robert says

A wonderful collection that is vivid yet surprisingly subtle. The desperation of the characters seeps under your skin. It seems there are an infinity of ways one can behave inappropriately. Sometimes the strain of suppressing one's vast, underlying insecurities can be equally humiliating. There's an attentiveness to power dynamics and to things like hirsute arms which is sexily off-kilter. A teacher's self-awareness is such that she discovers that, for her, living is "an attempt to do things that inspire admiration and envy in others." Another character, who wasn't seduced, reflects on how both she and her potential seducer have lost that moment in time and can never return. Embarrassments just boomerang back and forth so the characters are left stripped and human and comical yet also lovable. They evoke our pity since in them we recognize the repressed parts of ourselves.

Joseph Pfeffer says

A collection of short stories that, the longer I'm away from it, the more it feels like I read a novel. The overarching theme is younger women in relationships with older men. Each is very different, but somewhere in each story the bittersweet poignancy of such relationships comes through. It's been about 6 months, and I can't single out any particular story, but the entire book stays with me. I'm going to go back and read it again. Best collection of 2011, at least of the ones I read. (2'nd best, just for your information: Bradford Morrows The Uninnocent.)

Becky says

Really enjoyed this collection.

Marissa says

I found this collection of short stories overall enjoyable. It was fun to read a book by a local author who sprinkled bits of Chicago neighborhoods in several of the stories. I found myself interested in most of the stories as I was reading them and most of them ended leaving you wondering (but not in an obnoxious way) about what happened to the characters next. The stories mostly were about relationships (mostly romantic, a few about friendships) and had themes to which most of us could probably relate (dissatisfaction with a

relationship but being unable to leave, being taken advantage of, trying to hide parts of our lives, etc.). However, I found most of the characters to be unsatisfied with their situations which sometimes depressed ME as I was reading their stories. ;) While I enjoyed most of the stories, the last couple struck me as odd and I wasn't sure how they were included as they didn't seem as strong. Final random thought: the font size in the hardcover book is surprisingly small. While I was able to manage I can imagine a lot of people would find it somewhat challenging.

Djrmel says

A very good set of short stories with a terribly incorrect description here on Goodreads. The idea of "romantic love" enters into a couple of the stories, but for the most part these stories are about attachments and attractions and the holes that people try to fill with other people's lives. There's a single line in the story "You're So Different Now" that pretty much sums up the subject of all the stories: ".....knowing there are countless ways to be a part of someone else's life...", and with relationships based on lust ("Portraits of a Few of the People I've Made Cry", a need to escape ("Portraits Fully Developed"), and adventure gone sadly wrong "Quality of Life"), this book covers a lot more than romantic love. A few of the stories lack intensity ("Alex Cross, Inc." especially), but the character development is so strong in all of them that you'll be left wondering what happened next, and what's a short story without that sense of hit-and-run?

Meredith says

I have a love/hate relationship with short stories. When they're just OK, I'm grateful they're short and I can quickly move on the next. But when they're good, I want more.

Christine Sneed's collection of stories is more hot than miss, which is great because she's quickly become one of my new favorite authors, but I also want to know what happens next. And yes, I've tweeted her, but I don't think I can ask that. :)

Dov Zeller says

Hmmm. I am tempted to use the gr star rating system because relying on stars helps me avoid writing more meaningful reviews. And I am ambivalent about reviewing this book (with or without stars), partly because I am ambivalent about the book itself. I hesitate to write a critical review. Lately I really want to find the kernel of what people are trying to communicate and to focus on what is unique about a writer's awareness and sensibilities, rather than attending to what does not work for me. That said, I am not, I don't think, a fantastically generous reader. I am trying.

One thing I will say for this book. The title is spectacular. I was a little disappointed by the rest. I think the title led me to believe this collection would have a certain sense of humor or wit. The title is a bit of a misrepresentation, somehow, of the ethos of the book.

The first story is quite good, the best in the collection in many ways. It's a spare, finely crafted little horror story in which violence comes over time in subtle ways -- mainly in the form of emotional withdrawal, withholding of affection and information, and a cold and dangerous unwillingness, of an apparently powerful older man, to end an affair with a younger, more vulnerable female protagonist, who, over time, finds herself

attracted to and repulsed by his offers of infrequent and finite sexual contact. They go to hotels, have sex, and he gives her mystifying handfuls of cash. Does he see her as a daughter? a lover? a sex worker? something else? How does her confusion about his intentions and perception of her influence how she sees herself? Their small, dubious intimacies, remain at an unnameable distance from the messy, intimate, imperfections of more engaged love. Lyndsey finds herself at first drawn in by the strange and neat lines of their connection, until these lines blur and blur into something quite sinister. At a certain point she can no longer read the meaning of things at all (his actions, her feelings, what it is that led her down this road, and whether there is an exit on this highway to hell.) Seems like some people see this as a cautionary tale about getting involved with strangers? Something along the lines of, this woman put herself in harms way by having an affair with this man, and the author is holding her accountable for her actions? Eek. I hope to god that this isn't the point or the attitude of this story. I certainly didn't read it that way. I think it has subtler considerations about intimacy, patterns of behavior that create deeper and deeper grooves in the pathways of our lives. There are unspoken, unaddressed things that can turn into dangerous undercurrents because we cannot or will not become adequately conscious of them until the currents are already too strong to break free of.

After the first story, I found the stories less and less compelling. The prose gets messier and the themes and language repetitive. Nevertheless, I appreciate the characters and their attempts to understand their own mysterious relationships to love, sex, affection, connection. These are smart and curious explorations of relationships, mainly romantic ones, in which people's motives are unclear to each other, and even themselves. There is some mystery in each story about the laws or facts or possibilities of attraction.

Danine says

The first few stories are short stories that give a glimpse of the lives of the characters. After reading more stories there was a recurring theme and formula. All the stories include couples that are romantically involved with a large age gap between the two lovers. Think soft core sugar daddy and cougar porn. I can handle that. But every single story contained this formula and the only thing that made these stories different were the characters and settings. Sneed is a fine wordsmith, but the stories grew trite and predictable. It would have been nice to have a variety of stories as I thought that's what I was getting from reading the book synopsis.

Sonatajessica says

Well, short story collections are hard to rate for me. Usually you end up with a bunch of mediocre ones, one or two that were rather boring, one you don't get at all and one or two that were rather good, if you are lucky even the brilliant one you were hoping to find. So how do you judge that? Most of the time that ends in a 3 star result for me. Unless I find a treasure.

Not this time though. This anthology was more on the disappointing side, even the stories that i liked were simply fair, nice, never special or surprising, the second star was for "Quality of life" and "A million dollars", the only stories that gave me something. Most of them left me rather cold, the more i read of Sneed's stories the less i cared what she had to say. Plus the narrating voice is hardly ever an interesting one. On top of it, I ended up with the feeling that she didn't dare to go the hard way, the unexpected way with her characters. Whenever a story could take a gripping turn she played it safe (and boring). And once again I learned the lesson to never (!!!) trust what critics especially other authors say about a book,

most of the times they might be just good friends returning a favor. Because these are anything but "brutally honest and equally tender" stories as it is said on the back.

The same about the title of this collection, "Portraits of a few of the people i made cry" which made me go for the book in the first place, BUT not only do I disguise it if the title for one story is used for the whole anthology (same with songs and album titles), it is for sure a bad fit in this case and a misleading one for the entireness of this selection.

Writing this I am actually debating to go back to one star but that would do injustice to the two nicer stories mentioned above, so two stars it is.

Kailey says

I really enjoyed this! Probably my favorite I've read for the City Lit book club. There were some beautiful passages, particularly one about aging in "By The Way" that moved me. The last two stories are wildly different from the rest. I'm excited to discuss their relevance.

Kristie says

I am not normally a fan of short stories mostly because I want to get more deeply into the characters and their stories. However, this book was fantastic and might have changed my mind a little on short stories. I definitely felt like I wanted to learn more about each set of characters, but they were interesting snapshots into their lives.

Victor Giron says

Just great. These are very well written stories that at first threaten to be predictable (or at least that was what I expected before starting it), but what I loved is how they have this crazy level of suspense, surprise, borderline dread. Ms. Sneed does a fantastic job of pulling out elements of these situations and hitting you over the head with them. Quite a surprise. I'm so glad to have read these stories and look forward to reading future work by Christine.

Christine says

I had to give my book 5-stars - no use in pretending I don't think it rocks! It was a true pleasure to write these ten stories and I'm glad that Portraits is out there in the world, meeting readers.

Dirk says

The title is deceptive. Theses stories are not about people anyone made cry. A secondary character in one story has given that title to some graphic sketches.

Some of these stories are first person, others third person narrowly following the protagonist. The stories are set in contemporary America, but vary in social milieu from sophisticated upper bohemians to working class

uneducated. The protagonist in many is a thoughtful, somewhat rueful woman dealing intelligently with winding her way among career and romantic issues. Sneed pays attention to the erotic, and many of the stories are sexy, without usually being very explicit. Many of them involve couples where one partner is notably older than the other, usually, but not always, the man. Several involve the effect of the prospect of glamour, or the effect of a glamorous person on the lives of people around him/her, but here is nothing trivial about these stories.

What I like most about the stories is the rich reality of the characters. No caricatures like Dickens or stereotypes like T. C Boyle; these folks, even many secondary characters, walk right off the page and inhabit your mind. The stories are not slices of life; you get a sense of the whole life of the main characters, really quite an achievement and the short form. The prose is clean; it does its job well without calling attention to itself, but can rise to moving occasions. The plots are thoughtfully constructed and are notable for reflecting the character of the protagonist. You come away both with the feeling you have learned a little about how people navigate life (or fail to), and that you have more questions. Detailed descriptions of settings from time to time add to the depth of texture - not exactly in style of Balzac, but in his tradition.

The series are not experimental; this is mainstream fiction. However in one story, my favorite, the narrator describes a series of interviews between her and some one who is researching the life of her glamorous late husband. Her account illuminates: her relation with her husband, with the interviewer, with her whole past, and with erotic involvement very reflectively and ingeniously.
