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Dear Husband: Stories



Synopsis

“Oates] has once again held a haunting mirror up to America, revealing who we are.” Boston Globe
The inimitable Joyce Carol Oates returns with *Dear Husband* “a gripping and moving story collection that powerfully re-imagines the meaning of family in America, often through violent means. Oates, a former recipient of the PEN/Malamud Award for Excellence in Short Fiction “as well as the National Book Award, Prix Femina, and numerous other literary honors “dazzles and disturbs with an outstanding compilation the Washington Post calls, “Savage, poetic and ruthless...among the best things she’s ever done.” *Dear Husband* is another triumph for the author of *The Gravedigger’s Daughter*, *We Were the Mulvaneys*, and *Blonde*.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

When a book pops up on my screen from author Joyce Carol Oates I download it, always. When it is a collection of short stories, I am even happier. *Dear Husband: Stories* is a collection of previously published stories, completely portable and fun to read. For me, Oates is unique in the way she presents thought-stopping surprise sentences in the middle of excellently crafted stories. The surprise sentences are like gifts; the stories alone are great. As I usually do with short stories, I will

comment on each one. Panic Imagine you are a parent and must choose between saving your only child or saving your spouse. You choose the child but everyone survives, how does the family dynamic change? What does the sacrificed spouse think of the choice? Special Aimee grew up fast. She had to. It was as if her older sister had evil designs on her. The Blind Man's Sighted Daughters Lyle Sebera controlled his daughters all their life. Abigail moved away, Helen stayed to take care of Lyle even though he was in his eighties and almost blind. But Abigail came back when Helen called, just for a couple of days, but during those days Lyle demonstrated his control. Magda Maria The unnamed narrator is in love with Magda Maria but he has to stand in line and wait for a chance. There are Danto and Wolverine and Maria's frequent disappearances to live through. But she always returns and our narrator is always waiting. There is a final meeting but only because our narrator has fled after one last meeting. But he knows where to find his love should he ever want to. A Princeton Idyll Muriel had worked for Sophie's family for years and had been a part-time nanny to Sophie. After three decades Muriel wrote to Sophie with some memories.

Oates, an incredibly prolific writer, can be relied on to craft haunting and macabre short stories that leave the reader shaken and shell-shocked. Her longer fiction is, however, more chequered and inconsistent in my opinion, and one takes a risk when ploughing into one of her novels. Perhaps it is too claustrophobic to be trapped inside her dark gothic world for prolonged periods, and the narrative sags. There is fortunately no such failing in this collection. In each of the stories in Dear Husband, which are slotted into two parts, miscreant characters dot the storyscape; from the deceptively stately middle-aged librarian, whose obsession with a defendant interferes with her juror duties in 'Mistrial', to the young upright lawyer in the opener 'Panic', who grapples with feelings of inadequacy, doubt and betrayal, in the aftermath of what he had mistaken as a threatening gesture from the boys in the school bus in front of his family car and his wife's reaction to it. Oates's brand of urban horror works because of the seemingly innocuous settings, which are almost invariably suburban, and the relatively 'safe' backgrounds of the characters, with arguably strong (or suffocating) familial ties. Many of these stories deal with family relationships and explore the crises that arise, often from little kinks in an otherwise wholesome exterior. In 'Special', a young girl scarred in a domestic accident, struggles to heal and move on, even as she confronts the ambivalence of her family, and the unspoken tussle with her intellectually-challenged sister. Elsewhere, Oates uses the epistolary form to track the unravelling of a Vietnam veteran as he bombards the (fictional?)

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