

The Collected Stories of Amy Hempel

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Amy Hempel is a master of the short story. This celebrated volume gathers together her complete work -- four short collections of stunning stories about marriages, minor disasters, and moments of revelation.

With her inimitable compassion and wit, Hempel introduces characters who make choices that seem inevitable, and whose longings and misgivings evoke eternal human experience.

For readers who have known Hempel's work for decades and for those who are just discovering her, this indispensable volume contains all the stories in *Reasons to Live*, *At the Gates of the Animal Kingdom*, *Tumble Home*, and *The Dog of the Marriage*. No reader of great writing should be without it.

Amy Hempel is the author of *Sing to It*, *The Dog of the Marriage*, *Tumble Home*, *At the Gates of the Animal Kingdom*, *Reasons to Live*, and the coeditor of *Unleashed*. Her stories have appeared in *Harper's*, *Vanity Fair*, *GQ*, *Tin House*, *The Harvard Review*, *The Quarterly*, and have been widely anthologized, including *Best American Short Stories* and *The Best Nonrequired Reading*. She teaches in the Graduate Writing Program at Bennington College, and at Stony Brook Southampton. She lives near New York City.

BEACH TOWN

The house next door was rented for the summer to a couple who swore at missed croquet shots. Their music at night was loud, and I liked it; it was not music I knew. Mornings, I picked up the empties they had lobbed across the hedge, Coronas with the limes wedged inside, and pitched them back over. We had not introduced ourselves these three months.

Between our houses a tall privet hedge is backed by white pine for privacy in winter. The day I heard the voice of a woman not the wife, I went out back to a spot more heavily planted but with a break I could just see through. Now it was the man who was talking, or trying to -- he started to say things he could not seem to finish. I watched the woman do something memorable to him with her mouth. Then the man pulled her up from where she had been kneeling. He said, "Maybe you're just hungry. Maybe we should get you something to eat."

The woman had a nimble laugh.

The man said, "Paris is where you and I should go."

The woman asked what was wrong with here. She said, "I like a beach town."

I wanted to phone the wife's office in the city and hear what she would sound like if she answered. I had no fellow feeling; all she had ever said to me was couldn't I mow my lawn later in the day. It was noon when she asked. I told her the village bylaws disallow mowing before seven-thirty, and that I had waited until nine. A gardener, hired by my neighbor, cared for their yard. But still I was sure they were neglecting my neighbor's orchids. All summer long I had watched for the renters to leave the house together so that I could let myself in with the key from the shelf in the shed and test the soil and water the orchids.

The woman who did not want to go to Paris said that she had to leave. "But I don't want you to leave," the man said, and she said, "Think of the kiss at the door."

Nobody thinks about the way sound carries across water. Even the water in a swimming pool. A week later, when her husband was away, the wife had friends to lunch by the pool. I didn't have to hide to listen; I was in view if they had cared to look, pulling weeds in the raspberry canes.

The women told the wife it was an opportunity for her. They said, "Fair is fair," and to do those things she might not otherwise have done. "No regrets," they said, "if you are even the type of person who is given to regret, if you even have that type of wistful temperament to begin with."

The women said, "We are not unintelligent; we just let passion prevail." They said, "Who would deny that we have all had these feelings?"

The women told the wife she would not feel this way forever. "You will feel worse, however, before you feel better, and that is just the way it always is."

The women advised long walks. They told the wife to watch the sun rise and set, to look for solace in the natural world, though they admitted there was no comfort to be found in the world and they would all be fools to expect it.

The weekend the couple next door had moved in -- their rental began on Memorial Day -- I heard them place a bet on the moon. She said waxing, he said waning. Days later, the moon nearly full in the night sky, I listened for the woman to tell her husband she had won, knowing they had not named the terms of the bet, and that the woman next door would collect nothing.

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Other Books

Bowker Annual Library and Book Trade Almanac,

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