



Park City: New and Selected Stories (Vintage Contemporaries)

Ann Beattie

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Thirty-six stories--eight appearing in a book for the first time and a generous selection from her earlier collections--give us Ann Beattie at stunning mid-career.

Emotionally complex, edgy, and funny, the stories encompass a huge range of tone and feeling. The wife of a couple who have lost a child comforts her husband with an amazing act of tenderness. A man who's been shifting from place to place, always finding the same kind of people--sometimes the same people in various configurations--tries to locate himself in the universe. An intricate dance of adultery brings down a marriage. A housekeeper experiences a startling epiphany while looking into her freezer one hot summer night. The long, humorous roll of a couple's "four-night fight" finally explodes into happiness.

Beattie has often been called the chronicler of her generation, and these stories capture perfectly the moods and actions of our world since the seventies: people on the move, living in group houses, smoking too much dope; people settling down, splitting up, coming to terms.

Margaret Atwood said of a previous collection that "a new Beattie is almost like a fresh bulletin from the front: We snatch it up, eager to know what's happening out there on the edge of that shifting and dubious no-man's-land known as interpersonal relations." The new stories have the same power. A family secret is revealed in a strange and puzzling act that becomes understood only many years later. In an AIDS ward, certain questions take on special significance. A hostile eight-year-old and his father's live-in girlfriend move in fits and starts toward détente.

In prose by turns laserlike and lyrical, these memorable, evocative stories authentically recall the details and feelings of their time. But the truths revealed are--as in all fiction of the first rank--timeless.

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