



Birds of America

Lorrie Moore

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A long-awaited collection of stories--twelve in all--by one of the most exciting writers at work today, the acclaimed author of *Who Will Run the Frog Hospital?* and *Self-Help*. Stories remarkable in their range, emotional force, and dark laughter, and in the sheer beauty and power of their language.

From the opening story, "Willing", about a second-rate movie actress in her thirties who has moved back to Chicago, where she makes a seedy motel room her home and becomes involved with a mechanic who has not the least idea of who she is as a human being, *Birds of America* unfolds a startlingly brilliant series of portraits of the unhinged, the lost, the unsettled of our America.

In the story "Which Is More Than I Can Say About Some People" ("There is nothing as complex in the world--no flower or stone--as a single hello from a human being"), a woman newly separated from her husband is on a long-planned trip through Ireland with her mother. When they set out on an expedition to kiss the Blarney Stone, the image of wisdom and success that her mother has always put forth slips away to reveal the panicky woman she really is.

In "Charades," a family game at Christmas is transformed into a hilarious and insightful (and fundamentally upsetting) revelation of crumbling family ties.

In "Community Life," a shy, almost reclusive, librarian, Transylvania-born and Vermont-bred, moves in with her boyfriend, the local anarchist in a small university town, and all hell breaks loose. And in "Four Calling Birds, Three French Hens," a woman who goes through the stages of grief as she mourns the death of her cat (Anger, Denial, Bargaining, Haagen Dazs, Rage) is seen by her friends as really mourning other issues: the impending death of her parents, the son she never had, Bosnia.

In what may be her most stunning book yet, Lorrie Moore explores the personal and the universal, the idiosyncratic and the mundane, with all the wit, brio, and verve that have made her one of the best storytellers of our time.

Birds of America Details

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From Reader Review Birds of America for online ebook

Guille says

No había leído nada de esta autora y un día me encontré con un comentario que me llevó a otro, que me llevó a otro... hasta que decidí leer este libro que parecía ser el sùmmum de la maestría de la autora. Y lo cierto es que esta mujer escribe pero que muy bien y lo hace además de forma inteligente, muy inteligente, quizás demasiado inteligente, de tal modo que su exhibición al escribir casi llega a hacérseme pornográfica.

Hay unos cuantos relatos que me han gustado mucho. De los que no, creo que al final acabé por descubrir donde radicaba el problema, lo que, no obstante, no solucionó mi desencuentro con la escritora. El quid de la cuestión era que yo buscaba un tema, la columna vertebral de cada cuento; centraba demasiado mi visión en la anécdota que contaba, cuando la verdad es que termino con la impresión de que el suceso narrado no es sino un pretexto para las lucubraciones, los comentarios, los chascarrillos, sus sentencias y frases lapidarias, y, como no, para mostrar su incuestionable valía como escritora, su personalísimo estilo, que no discuto lo más mínimo. Sin embargo, como corolario de esa primera impresión tengo que decir que toda esa artillería que despliega Moore en algunos de los cuentos parece estar únicamente al servicio de ese chascarrillo, de ese comentario ingenioso, de esa observación punzante. Cada frase tenía que ser brillante para poder pertenecer al libro, cada diálogo ocurrente. Todo ello no hace otra cosa que transmitir una cierta sensación de artificio, de juego, de un placer que empieza y acaba con la lectura, lo que tampoco es que esté mal per se, pero acaba sabiendo a poco.

Alan says

She's an excellent story writer - this is her best I think. I treasure my signed copy!

just come across some notes on this from a 1998 notebook:

her stuff can hit like a brick round the head. She recounts bruising, tiresome relationships fearlessly, picking the right moments out. Bitterness, the brutality of what we can think and feel, and how we can't forgive ourselves. In 'Real Estate' a death from lung cancer, intertwined with a story of a burglar who makes his victims sing and writes down the words, but can't recall the tunes when he gets home. The singing night, the spaceship like a set of lit teeth in the sky; the page and a half of Ha's! In Peed Onk a community of pain the mother doesn't want to join, but can't help. And the last one about a woman who accidentally kills a baby, marries an academic who is patient, awkward with her, takes her to Italy for a month with other academics. Great stuff.

Stef Smulders says

The writing is very smart and I like the dark humor, the wisecracks. But the stories themselves are too much alike, the main characters are more or less of the same type and there is not too much happening. Good to read a single story once and a while but not an entire collection.

Liz says

I really liked Lorrie Moore's "How To Be an Other Woman" (from the love stories collection I read) but I was not wowed by this book. The stories all seemed very similar - isolated, lonely people (mostly women) dealing with husbands and families and communities. I just looked at the overwhelmingly glowing reviews here on goodreads, and hmm, I just don't get it.

5 stars - "Four Calling Birds, Three French Hens"

4 stars - the joke in "Beautiful Grade" about the professor writing Flannery O'Connor articles ("A Good Man Really IS Hard To Find," "Everything That Rises MUST INDEED Converge," "The Totemic South: The Violent ACTUALLY DO Bear It Away")

- "Real Estate" (I thought I didn't like this one much until I got drunk and analyzed it)

3.5 stars - a mix of "Agnes of Iowa" and "Community Life". I felt like these two were especially similar but nearly great.

- "People Like That are the Only People Here"

2 stars - basically everything else

1 star - "What You Want To Do Fine" and "Charades"

Paul Bryant says

"The thing to remember about love affairs," says Simone, "is that they are all like having raccoons in your chimney."

"Oh, not the raccoon story," groans Cal.

"Yes! The raccoons!" cries Eugene.

I'm sawing at my duck.

"We have raccoons sometimes in our chimney," explains Simone.

"Hmmm," I say, not surprised.

"And once we tried to smoke them out. We lit a fire, knowing they were there, but we hoped that the smoke would cause them to scurry out the top and never come back. Instead, they caught on fire and came crashing down into our living room, all charred and in flames and running madly around until they dropped dead."

Simone swallows some wine. "Love affairs are like that," she says. "They all are like that."

So anyway, the story "People Like that are the only people Here" is great, every word skewered onto the page, and half way through I thought This Is No Mere Story, which Wikipedia confirmed was correct, it was autobiographical. But - the very next story "Terrific Mother" was so awful I thought I had to retire this book for a long time & finish it later. 40 pages of mind numbing couldn't give a flying fcuk about these people. 40 pages about a couple at a retreat for academic writers and the lass goes for a massage regularly and they decide they love each other or they don't and I could care a whole lot more about that.

Miriam says

Beautiful stories, obviously. This is also the book that everyone says YOU MUST READ THIS. So, of course I am resistant to it. I did like it, but I also felt like each story hit a similar note...which is probably a good thing for a collection, but is a bad thing for a reader. All of her stories (in here, nowhere else) have this feeling of spending a day in a musty house to me...not sure if that makes sense.

Emalie Soderback says

I just remember reading this book in almost one sitting, I think, waiting for my boyfriend to get home from work. It is something that winds tightly around your throat and makes you cry in short hot spurts, like, am I really reading a book right now?. After each story, almost (there are 12), I would have to set the book down and recompose myself. It is a heartbreakingly honest account of different types of loss and growth and so so beautiful.

"Yeah, I like them all right," he said, and she would nod slyly and drink a little too much. She would try then not to think too strenuously about her whole life. She would try to live life one day at a time, like an alcoholic - drink, don't drink, drink. Perhaps she should take drugs. "I always thought someday I would have a little girl and name her after my grandmother." Sidra sighted, peered wistfully into her sherry. "What was your grandmother's name?" Sidra looked at his paisley mouth. "Grandma. Her name was Grandma.

Steve says

Lorrie "Morbid" Moore's book of stories were bleak and foreboding, but they appealed to me more than I'd have thought. She is a very talented writer. It's always appreciated when you can go deep into the heads of characters to discover those remote yet recognizable elements of the way we humans can be. It's not like the stories are relentlessly dark. There's even some humor at times – good, sharply observed stuff. It's just drearier in tone than I'm used to enjoying, so it surprised me when I did.

Barbara says

I don't usually read short story collections but picked up this one for a book club.

Moore's stories are well-written and insightful, and she can write humorous scenes, but overall I thought the book was somewhat depressing. In the end I was left with the impression that it's almost impossible for two people to have a fulfilling relationship and almost everyone is unhappy in one way or another. Though this may very well be true it's still dispiriting to read about.

In some of these stories characters hook up with the wrong people because they're lonely and needy - and

then are disappointed. In other stories characters have dishonest and/or unfaithful partners and have a hard time dealing with it (throw the bum out would be my view - but this may be easier said than done).

One story is about parents coping with a baby who's stricken with cancer. Another is about a woman who was holding a friend's baby when an accident occurs, killing the child; of course the woman blames herself and can hardly go on.

I think my favorite story is about an unhappy spouse who learns to use a gun, then gets to shoot a nutcase who breaks into people's homes to make them sing. For me this was the most satisfying tale.

It's a good book but you'll probably need something light and fun after reading it.

You can follow my reviews at <https://reviewsbybarbsaffer.blogspot...>

Jessica says

One of my main strategies for dealing with life is, "If I don't laugh, I'll cry."

I think Lorrie Moore's strategy is to make me do both.

Wanda says

I'm not a huge fan of short stories, and I feel like I was rather fooled by the cover of this book into tackling it. I have worked with the Whooping Crane reintroduction program here in Calgary, exercising young crane chicks, and I simply couldn't resist the pretty cover with the Whooping Crane on it. Plus that alluring title (for a birder), *Birds of America*. How either the image or the title relate to the stories within remains a mystery to me.

Moore's stories are rather bleak views of human relationships—told from all kinds of angles but with similar disappointments to go round. As in this dinner party exchange:

"The thing to remember about love affairs," says Simone, "is that they are all like having raccoons in your chimney."

"Oh, not the raccoon story," groans Cal.

"Yes! The raccoons!" cries Eugene.

I'm sawing at my duck.

"We have raccoons sometimes in our chimney," explains Simone.

"Hmmm," I say, not surprised.

"And once we tried to smoke them out. We lit a fire, knowing they were there, but we hoped that the smoke would cause them to scurry out the top and never come back. Instead, they caught on fire and came crashing down into our living room, all charred and in flames and running madly around until they dropped dead."

Simone swallows some wine. "Love affairs are like that," she says. "They all are like that."

I don't believe I've ever had a love affair which ended quite so spectacularly. Apparently, I am doing it wrong.

Liz Janet says

I cannot stop comparing every "literary short story collection" to *We Should Never Meet: Stories*, and this was no exception. (since it is one of the best collections ever) However, before I go into any more detail, I must thank **Sanaa** from InkBonesBooks for introducing me to Lorrie Moore due to one of her book hauls, because she truly is a very good author I would not have heard from otherwise.

Her plot, her writing, was just an air of elegance and perfection, this is one of the quotes: "What makes humans human is precisely that they do not know the future." With every short story in this collection, she weaves what others can only achieve with full-length novels, what she does is an art, up there with Jorge Luis Borges, Raymond Carver, Alice Munro, and Alice Adams.

Riva Sciuto says

"Life: what an absurd little story it always made."

This short story collection reveals exactly why Lorrie Moore is one of the most revered authors of our time. The twelve stories that comprise 'Birds of America' are hilariously funny, painfully sad, and deeply human. "Oh, the rich torment that was life," she writes in "Real Estate." Perhaps what I love most about her stories are the characters that bring them to life: they are real people, full of fears and flaws and imperfections. They reveal the complexities that make us all human: our longing to find meaning in our lives; our desire for human connection; and the sad but encouraging universality of our losses.

In Moore's stories, we meet the vulnerable and the lonely and the grief-stricken and the ambitious. In "Willing," we meet "a man held hostage by the anxious cast of his dream" and a woman who "was unequal to anyone's wistfulness. She had made too little of her life. Its loneliness shamed her like a crime." In "Community Life," we meet the mysterious Olena, who "wished to start over again, to be someone living coltishly in the world, not someone hidden away, behind books, with a carefully learned voice and a sad past." In "Beautiful Grade," we meet Bill, whose "own sadness ... slosh about in his life in a low-key way, formless and self-consuming." In "What You Want To Do Fine," we are introduced to Quilty, whose blindness never stops him from wanting to see the world around him.

These stories are rich with both humor and sadness, no doubt the sign of remarkable writing. Moore has a unique ability to capture with words the depths of human suffering and the breadth of human emotions in a way I've never quite seen before. More than anything, she reminds us that a full life is full of beauty and suffering, of darkness and joy. In "Real Estate," Moore writes, "She never knew anymore what was good life and what was bad, what was desirable matter and what was antimatter, what was the thing itself and what was the death of the thing: one mimicked the other, and she resented the work of having to distinguish." In the book's final story, "Terrific Mother," Moore highlights the complexity and ambiguity of life: "...In this temporary dissolve, seeing death and birth, seeing the beginning and then the end, how they were the same quiet black, same nothing ever after: everyone's life appeared in the world like a dark movie in a room. First dark, then light, then dark again. But it was all staggered, so that somewhere there was always light."

I'll end with my favorite passage from this book, which comes from "Which Is More Than I Can Say About Some People": "Abby began to think that all the beauty and ugliness and turbulence one found scattered through nature, one could also find in people themselves, all collected there, all together in a single place. No matter what terror or loveliness the earth could produce -- winds, seas -- a person could produce the same, lived with the same, lived with all that mixed-up nature swirling inside, every bit. There was nothing as complex in the world -- no flower or stone -- as a single hello from a human being."

Five stars for this beautiful and unforgettable collection.

Andrew Hicks says

To celebrate my one-year anniversary of joining Goodreads, I've decided to read and review one 5-star book from each of the five favorite new reading buddies I've met on GR. First up is *Birds of America*, a collection of 12 short stories from Lorrie Moore. It's a favorite book of my new pal Snotchocheez, a kind, wise, supportive, all-around cool guy.

Now, in 1998, when *BOA* was released, I was 20. I was a junior in college at Mizzou. I was fed up for life with the academic approach to analyzing literature. Call me simple (and do it slowly, with exaggerated head nods, to increase my chances of understanding you), but I like to read for enjoyment. My holy trinity is plot, character and voice, and that's all I need. I don't care about symbolism, and I don't want to spend an hour dissecting the deep meaning of a single descriptive paragraph.

BOA was a double whammy - a lofty, cerebral book designed to be cherished and studied by intellectuals that is itself densely populated with professors, writers and miscellaneous academic nimrods. It views them with the correct amount of detached irony while still being of the same mind, which to me was a blessing and a curse.

I'm glad I read *BOA*, and on any given page there were phrases and observations to love, with abundant sparkling wit applied toward a broad spectrum of human experiences. But this book was never a close friend or a page-turner. Its place was more in the lecture hall of my soul than the dorm room or even the dining hall. (I love the dining hall.)

This is a collection of twelve short stories, all but one of them previously published in the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, et al. The protagonists of most of these stories are restless, unsatisfied women in their thirties who distract themselves with devoted lesser men. Collectively, most of these characters are interchangeable.

Which made me think, when you have a bunch of same-ish stories that feature same-ish protagonists, why not composite them into a single novel? But then I thought, *Well, because it's easier to just write a story here, a story there, get two bucks a word to publish them in a lit mag, then re-edit and compile them into a single book, get a fat check from Random House, do a nice little public-appearance tour to support it, then go back to your day job as tenured professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where you can assign your own book to your students as required reading and then spend a semester's worth of classes talking about how good it is using nothing but Big Words.* Geez, I'm cynical.

BOA gains momentum as it goes, though. The first real break from the same-ish protagonist formula is like four stories from the end, with a vacationing gay couple where one is blind and the other is actually straight, or thought he was. You'll see seriously sick little kids (like, nearing death) pop up here and there, culminating in "People Like That Are the Only People Here," the most heart-wrenching story in the book.

That story tunnels further into the human psyche than I could even attempt, and has some bitter belly laughs to boot.

The last story, "Wonderful Mother," begins with its protagonist being handed a baby at a family-and-friends function, losing her balance and fatally dropping the baby on its head. So let me point out - this is the kind of premise the short-story format is perfect for. Do I want to be stuck with an accidental baby-killer protagonist for 350 pages? Nope. Will I spend 40 pages full-on engaged while she marries some professor just because he insists on it, then takes her to this nightmarish European academic retreat? You bet I will.

By the way, I'm 37, I have a bachelor's degree, I'm a server in a fine-dining restaurant, I read a lot of young-adult fiction and celebrity memoirs, and my chances of going to grad school are still hovering steady at about 18%.

Sara Batkie says

Maybe the most perfect short story collection I've read (that wasn't a "collected works" or "best of"). I understand the criticisms of "same-y" characters and too-witty dialogue, but frankly I don't care. Lorrie Moore can wrap me around her little finger any time. Kakutani's back blurb calls the book: "sad, funny, lyrical, and prickly" and that's probably the best way to describe her. She is awash in those kinds of contradictions, but it's what makes her stories a joy to read. You always end up where you least expected to go but somehow in her absurd little world, it makes sense. There were times I laughed aloud: "He doesn't believe in shouting 'Fire' in a crowded movie theater, but he does believe in shouting 'Fie!' and has done it twice himself - both times at Forrest Gump" (132) and there were times I wept, and there were times her prose got something so right that I just sat there dumbfounded: "She knew she was saying good-bye to something important, which was not that bad, in a way, because it meant that at least you had said hello to it to begin with" (80). I'm sure I'll start imitating her now. Sigh.

I have a habit of highlighting my favorite stories in the contents as I go along. They were: "Which is More Than I Can Say About Some People", "Dance in America", "Charades", "What You Want to Do Fine", "People Like That Are the Only People Here" (probably the very best, if you only read one, read this), and "Terrific Mother". All the stories are well done and worth reading, though.

And psst, Ms. Moore, it's been almost ten years since this book came out. I demand more! (he he, sorry, had to)

Forrest says

Birds of America is a story collection by one of the most talented (but minimal) writers around, Lorrie Moore. The stories here are not big or grand or epic, but work simply as little one-act plays, exposing the inherent complexities and dramas in the everyday lives we all lead.

Moore's writing style is subtle, and laced with a fantastic sense of wit; witness, for example, her slight mocking of the health fad craze in the names she creates for juice bars; or her sly commentary about the misnomer of "busy bee" in the story "Whatever You Want, Fine." Added to this wit is a keen sense of what it means to be on this earth and to interact with someone else (I'm being cliché here, because I'm no Lorrie Moore), to have an effect upon someone's life simply because you happen to walk a similar road together for awhile, and it is the way in which she explores this truth that gives her stories the weight they need to avoid being simple comic pieces.

The three best stories, in my opinion, are "Four Calling Birds, Three French Hens," "People Like That Are The Only People Here," and "Which is More Than I Can Say About Some People." The first story deals with a woman who has a wonderfully loving husband and a great daughter, but can't get over the loss of her cat, and so decides to undergo therapy that guarantees to "cure her by Christmas or the last session is free!" The second deals with pediatric oncology in a harrowing and moving way, about the distance illness brings between people, and the last deals with a mother and daughter, on a road trip through Ireland, and the ways in which revelations of character don't end simply because you know someone for years and years.

These are wonderful, wonderful stories, the kind that make you think about your own life, examine it in the ways the characters are examined here, that affirm realizations you yourself have come to or guide you toward ones you haven't, and I don't think you can ask for much more than that from a book.

Sergsab says

Todo el mundo te habla de lo maravillosa que es esa persona. De cómo será cuando alguien como tú se encuentre con alguien como ella. Todo el mundo habla bien de ella. Y sólo te falta conocerla a ti. Y cuando estáis cara a cara, cuando os miráis y habláis, lo sabéis. Todo el mundo os observa. Por lo que es más incómodo aun. Mierda! No tenéis nada en común, no tenéis ni un puto punto de conexión sobre el que podáis, no ya construir algo, sino sobre el que salir airosos de este primer y último encuentro.

Ojalá hubiera otro modo de explicar mi relación con Moore. Ojalá me hubiese encantado y haber llevado estos relatos tan dentro de mí que no cabría otra que hablar de ellos en otros términos. No en estos, claro.

Pero no es el caso. Estos doce cuentos, estas doce mujeres sin piedad ni autoestima ni alcance posible de su masa crítica no me han dicho nada. No he sentido excitación. Ni miedo. Ni el placer momentáneo. Ni las llamas vivas que me empujarían a escribir una reseña mucho más lograda. Más exquisita.

La caída de los titanes. La falta de encuentro entre dos personas que se tienen frente a frente.

¿Tengo que disculparme? Claro que no. Pero me siento incómodo por que estas historias no hayan podido ser mis historias.

No me queda otra que dejar la jaula abierta y salir de la habitación.

Satyajeet says

Some stories are awesome, others are lackluster...but some are awesome!
Like this one

Antonia Crane says

Wildly ambitious and witty and brutal, Moore's stories are ambitious as they are smart. Rob Roberge referred to her stories at Antioch with fondness, and I was required to read "Anagrams" one project period, but I

didn't fall in love with her like I did with her collection of short stories: "Birds of America." In "What You Want to Do Fine," she tackles a difficult love between men, war, the draft, lost children, AIDS, blindness and the parade of bones in cemetery visits. She personalizes the hopeless boredom and gentleness of real intimacy between two people and the question that echoes is what is it to love and know someone? In "Real Estate" she smashed the narrative structure with her 2.5 pages of "Ha!" as a response to her husbands multiple affairs that happen in Spring. She shows where rage goes when it folds one's insides like origami. She does this with her witty genius and tricky twists of fate with other characters who act out a similar rage. But, the story that left the deepest imprint was "People Like That Are the Only People Here" which did loops around illness and the type of loss that happens, how it shreds relationships thread by thread and how when it's over, it's hollow survivors never want to see those people again, that sadness again. Ever. At the same time, the only thing survivors can relate to is grief and tragedy, like baby birds bonding in desperation.

Rachel says

I *loved* three of the stories in this collection: "Charades," about familial aggressions played out over a holiday game, "What You Want to Do Fine," about the breakdown of a romance between two men on endless road trip vacations across the US, and "Four Calling Birds, Three French Hens," about a married mother mourning her dead cat - which, despite sounding like it would mostly be sad, is also so deadpan funny that I laughed until I cried at one point.

I would say that I enjoyed reading about nine out of twelve stories, which is pretty good for a bigger story collection. My feeling about *Birds of America* reflects my feeling about Lorrie Moore's work in general. Mostly, it strikes me as funny and spot-on in terms of human oddness and vulnerabilities, but sometimes her writing crosses over into too much quirk (contrivance?) to be relatable.

Note: I have not read this two times, I have read it once. Goodreads will not let me change it back from read twice. WTF, Goodreads.
