



Rules for Old Men Waiting

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A brief, lyrical novel with a powerful emotional charge, **Rules for Old Men Waiting** is about three wars of the twentieth century and an ever-deepening marriage. In a house on the Cape “older than the Republic,” Robert MacIver, a historian who long ago played rugby for Scotland, creates a list of rules by which to live out his last days. The most important rule, to “tell a story to its end,” spurs the old Scot on to invent a strange and gripping tale of men in the trenches of the First World War.

Drawn from a depth of knowledge and imagination, MacIver conjures the implacable, clear-sighted artist Private Callum; the private’s nemesis Sergeant Braddis, with his pincerlike nails; Lieutenant Simon Dodds, who takes on Braddis; and Private Charlie Alston, who is ensnared in this story of inhumanity and betrayal but brings it to a close.

This invented tale of the Great War prompts MacIver’s own memories of his role in World War II and of Vietnam, where his son, David served. Both the stories and the memories alike are lit by the vivid presence of Margaret, his wife. As *Hearts and Minds* director Peter Davis writes, “Pouncey has wrought an almost inconceivable amount of beauty from pain, loss, and war, and I think he has been able to do this because every page is imbued with the love story at the heart of his astonishing novel.”

From the Hardcover edition.

Rules for Old Men Waiting Details

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Author : Peter R. Pouncey

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From Reader Review Rules for Old Men Waiting for online ebook

Bill Keefe says

Intrigued by the title I ventured in. The first chapter, the setting of the rules, kept me reading. Change, sadness and a self-prescribed regime for productive survival...productive winding down.

Given the title and the intro, I had expected, and hoped, that the prescription itself would play a large part in the story, perhaps following through a complex ending of life. As it turns out, the prescription serves as little more than a structure to keep the main character alive so that two stories can unfold, his and that of the quick novel chooses to write in his remaining days. His ending is not complex. He will not be "waiting" a long time, and other than his changing diet and declining health, there is little offered to better understand the wider value of the rules themselves.

So you have two stories, one a fairly simple, but interesting morality tale that takes place in the trenches of World War I, the main characters reflections on a life well led.

The two stories are interwoven, so that you drop in on one and the other; lessons overlap, events in one spur thoughts for the other. In the end you have a touching story of a man, his loves, his losses and maybe most of all his gratitude.

A good read.

Patricia says

A beautifully written and haunting novel. A story within in a story. Robert MacIver is an elderly professor and writer. He is living remotely after his wife, Margaret, has died. Age is catching up with him physically and mentally. He has a hard time focusing, remembering, and eating properly. As the story unfolds we learn about the sorrow he and Margaret carried when their only child, David, is killed. David was a medic in Vietnam and he returns home only to die from a leg wound received in the line of duty. Robert's Scottish father, Alastair, was a WWI. Robert served in WWII. David served in Vietnam.

Robert writes a story about the war theater of WWI. Sergeant Reggie Braddis is a highly skilled killer and a bully. He has it out for Private Tim Callum, who is an artist, and draws pictures in his off duty time. Lt. Simon Dodds is a kind, strong leader. He recognizes the private side and talent of Tim and reprimands Braddis for picking on Tim. Braddis seeks his revenge against Dodds. Callum gets even with Braddis. Private Charles Alston is witness to the atrocities. This story within the story was my favorite part of the book. I enjoyed how the characters were introduced and the story unfolded.

Karin says

Soulful yes. Making sense of three wars, loss and how to make it through the days after the loss of his wife until his own departure from life. Loved how the story within the story creates a complete story of a life. Wish the author wrote more.

Susan says

At 67, former classics professor and retired President of Amherst College, Peter Pouncey made his debut as a novelist. Here's to raising a toast to late bloomers and, with a nod to old men, I would recommend it be a glass of single malt Scotch.

With his wife of 40 years now gone, health failing, and winter coming on, Richard MacIvor sets out the rules for his last chapter. It is Rule #7 - Work every morning - that gives the reader the story within a story. I am not sure which story moved me more, MacIvor's reflection on a long life well lived, or the story that unfolds as he sits down each morning to write about WWI soldiers in the trenches of France.

Pouncey's writing is spare, straightforward, and beautiful; this compact novel covers an amazing amount of emotional terrain. Rules for Old Men Waiting is a terrific read.

Natalie says

A story within a story that shows how love can define a life, how decency can happen even between men who are not equals, how anger and ego can be tempered by friendship, how loyalty can overcome striving, how the burden and gift of mortality can bring a man to his knees or lift his thoughts beyond himself . . . All that pebbled with scenes that come alive through a nostalgic nod at art, music, humor, sex, travel, domestic life , academic life, and sport makes this a big little book !

Steve says

Liked it. A story about an old man dying, sad but not quite as sad as one might think. He's writing a short story, so there's a story-within-a-story aspect. The writing was pretty, maybe almost a little too pretty.

Linda says

I read this "Rules for Old Men" on my Kindle for one of my book club selections and I thoroughly enjoyed the book. Although these was sadness reading this story, is was very well done.

An old man, Robert MacIver, having lost his wife falls into a deep depression when thinking about his future life. He lives in a run down house in the countryside. The house needs much care taking. The front porch needs repairing and numerous daily tasks have to be done for him to successfully live in the house and just survive. He falls into a pattern of poor eating, lack of cleanliness and never shopping or cooking. He needs to lay in fire wood for the winter, shop for food, interact with others, make repairs on the house and yet he finds himself unable to move forward without his wife by his side

MacIver is a retired professor and a specialist in the First World War. As the story progresses, part of his regaining himself is re-telling his history, and that of others, focusing upon the conflict and horror of war. As

he decides to move forward with his life, he establishes 10 rules for himself to live by. The journey he takes the reader on is one back and forth in time and place and is full of vivid memories. This story is wonderfully done and is a sad, fateful and yet a gentle story. This is a book I would recommend.

Kaarin says

Apparently this is the one and only work of fiction that Peter Pouncey has ever written, and what an absolute gem it is. A must read for anyone who admires beautifully crafted, intelligent and soulful writing. This may even make my top 10 list, but then again, there are so many great books out there in the world....!

Harry Allagree says

Peter Pouncey writes elegantly & poetically as he unfolds the story of the last days & the ruminations of 80 year old Dr. Robert MacIver. MacIver reflects an honest attitude about the human endeavor, seen through the filter of his own life, even though he has never completely lost his knack for "bullyingness" in relationships. But for all his faults, he speaks of the genuine love which existed between his late wife, Margaret, their willingness to confront life together, and their attempt to look beyond the evident for the reality of people & things. They experienced the death of a beloved son, something many of us readers of this book share.

The passage in the book which most caught my eye was the reply by one of MacIver's former students to a question during an interview: "What was the most important lesson you learned from him?" She says: "Mr. MacIver always insisted that, whatever I was learning about historical methods in the course of my degree, I should never surrender the conviction...that a historian must involve himself passionately in the lives of the people he is studying. He has to understand the minute variances that are the real prime movers of historical change: the choices an individual can make, from the identical background as everyone around him, to crave something for himself and his family that is entirely different from the 'popular' choice. He was a notoriously passionate man himself and I think quite a few of his colleagues disapproved of him or were afraid of him."

Janet says

At first, I thought "what a depressing book", but suddenly I found it so moving, even uplifting. Very much like Crossing to Safety. An affirmation of the human spirit. (No to sound too cliched)!

Kklingon says

I loved the start of this one; it reminded me of Stegner, one of my great favorites. Then the author introduced a story within the story, and I wasn't too sure I wanted to break away from the original story. I stuck with it, though, and am glad I did. Lovely, (mostly) quiet book about coming to terms with one's life at its end.

Sara Woodbury says

A story within a story. A dying man writes the story that has been on his mind, and the story tells so much in so few words. A keeper.

Rebecca says

I love this writer. I like the way he writes about an old guy who at first seems to be waiting to die. I don't think it's a spoiler to say that he ends up living his life.

I would have guessed that I would want to read a book about an old guy examining his life, a book about a young man who thinks about the world, a book about a marriage relationship, a book about facing oneself, a book about discovering the effect one has had on others. I would not think that I would want to read a book about particular evils of WWI and WWII or even a book about rugby. Turns out I wanted to read it all.

I would have given this book 5 stars if it were longer. I want more from this writer.

Thanks to my sister Ruth for introducing me to him.

Corey says

A beautifully written novel about aging, war, and making peace with yourself.

Nikki says

A blind choice, this book. I don't typically lean toward war-related fiction, but I am so glad I picked up this short novel.

The author has a gift for description, for pace, for slow revelation of story. I loved the personal, vulnerable glimpse inside a complex and sensitive male character reflecting on his life through the struggle with loss and age, living a very real moment. I adored the characters, their development, the tales of their lives, their joys, their struggles, their hidden, personal moments. The narration is rich and authentic. The woven stories of MacIver's reminiscences, his deterioration, and his fiction-writing pursuits are elegant and profound. Classical music appeared throughout the story, and indeed the whole work had the deliberate, artful structure of a classical piece.

I loved this book.

Jesse Hanson says

A Brilliant Portrayal of a Man in Reflection~Of a Man with a Purpose.

I found this book in the little corner library (I could scarcely use the term more loosely) of an assisted living facility. I liked the cover. I read it and I now I have to return it but I don't want to--that means I'll have to buy my own copy. About the only part of me that didn't like it was my ego. I'm also a writer and I am jealous of the author's accomplishment... There, I said it.

Rules for Old Men Waiting is Peter Pouncey's debut novel. However he took a long time writing it; says he had no sense of urgency in the process. I'm not going to give anything away, but there is a character in his book who is writing with much more urgency. Well, it's easy to imagine what old men may be waiting for, anyway. But, one can hardly read this story without sensing the autobiographical quality of it. So, one way or the other, writer of the book, writer within the book, it's all to the reader's benefit.

So whether you have urgency in your life or you are one who just sits back, contented with a good book, this is a beautifully written story that will likely reach you and move you in its portrayal of a very masculine, and very sensitive, human experience.

Elizabeth Keuffel says

It started strong but I couldn't finish.

John says

I read two books about aging men the last few weeks; this one and "A Man Called Ove". Not sure if it was coincidence or looking for some "guides" ;) I can relate to taciturn craftsman Ove more than the academic rugby player MacIver. But I can relate to both of them methodically planning their path to what they see as tidy ends; no throwing fate to the wind. In contrast to MacIver who finds solace in words and ideas, Ove focuses on solid objects for their substance. What is common to them is their physical strength; one look and you see a rock (perhaps until they lose their spouses). Each has a constrained anger. Yet gentle-men in the end who honor what their wives taught them. In short, old school men; both struggling for a manly exit.

Tom LA says

What a wonderfully poetic book, with a huge soul. The narrative structure is not ideal, with the close third person telling us about a main character who himself is writing a book about his memories - but somehow it works. What is striking about this book is:

- the main character, MacIver: rough, brave, strong, Scottish masculine ex-rugby player who was an over-achiever, got a PhD in history, and at the same time has a keen eye for art and a wonderful ear for music. How refreshingly different from literary stereotypes.
- the descriptions of music pieces and works of art. Clearly, the author has a deep passion for art and he has an uncanny ability to put into words the beauty of a musical composition or that of a painting.
- the poetic mood of most passages especially in the vignettes from the past. A lot of this novel reads as "an old guy reminiscing", which potentially could be dreadfully boring, but the quality of the language and the cleverness of the main character's observations make it exciting and worthwhile.

On the downside, you could argue that there is not much of a narrative arc, or a driving tension throughout,

because most sections are slices of life from the past, almost separate short stories, but again, the content is never boring (except maybe brief parts of the war section, a little overdrawn in my opinion).

As a reader, you want to listen to McIver, because you are pulled in by his charisma and by his extraordinary strength. And by his extraordinary life.

p.s. I listened to the audiobook, and it was a true pleasure to hear the Scottish accent in the dialogues. The reader did a great job.

Koeeoaddi says

I keep thinking about this book, years after I read it. I think that merits another star, so 4 instead of 3.
