



The Cost of Lunch, Etc.: Short Stories

Marge Piercy

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In this collection of short stories, bestselling author Marge Piercy brings us glimpses into the lives of everyday women moving through and making sense of their daily internal and external worlds. Keeping to the engaging, accessible language of Piercy's novels, the collection spans decades of her writing along with a range of locations, ages, and emotional states of her protagonists. From the first-person account of hoarding and a girl's narrative of sexual and spiritual discovery to the recounting of a past love affair, each story is a tangible, vivid snapshot in a varied and subtly curated gallery of work. Whether grappling with death, familial relationships, friendship, sex, illness, or religion, Piercy's writing is as passionate, lucid, insightful, and thoughtfully alive as ever.

The Cost of Lunch, Etc.: Short Stories Details

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From Reader Review **The Cost of Lunch, Etc.: Short Stories** for online ebook

Randi says

I especially enjoyed the stories about the female 60s activists.

Barbara Melosh says

I've read all of Piercy's novels and most of her poetry. Her work bears witness to the experience and commitments of radicals who came of age in the 1960s, and of women shaped by the second wave of feminism. Anyone wanting to deepen their understanding of that history and of the ongoing activism of people formed by it should read Piercy. But...start anywhere but here. This collection does a huge disservice to the writer. The short story is not her genre, and only three or four of the twenty pieces included here are worth reading.

Anne Pytlak says

Some of these stories were really great. My favorite was "What Remains" about a woman who loses her sister to cancer and inherits her cats, and I also enjoyed "Saving Mother From Herself", about a hoarder. "She's Dying, He Said" is a touching story of a Jewish grandmother doting on her ill grandchild.

None of these stories is uplifting, just to warn you. But, they are well written and you'll certainly find your own favorites.

pax says

The content of a few of the stories ("What I promised and why" especially) tugs, painfully, in a good way painfully, the way a story should. Some others almost make me cringe in their honesty. But overall - something is missing. In the language? In the context, this being more sketches than stories? In the mix between the real and the imaginary, the fact, that it is unclear which stories are fictionalized reality and which pure fiction? Especially with "what I promised" I need to know whether this is real; the topic is too much, too painful, too close to leave it unclear. Which is strange, I never felt this way about Christa Wolf and how her stories merge fictionalize reality, but perhaps because there it seems to be more on purpose, written with more skill - which is a strange thing to say, I know Piercy *is* skilful in her other work that I love. Oh well. I guess this may just nit have been the right collection for me. (I'm still glad I've read it.)

Gloria says

This book just didn't do it for me. Most of the stories didn't hold my interest and I found many of the

characters and much of the writing style obnoxious.

Beth Browne says

Marge Piercy is my all-time favorite writer and I loved this book like all the rest. Some of the stories seemed like absolute fiction and others read like memoir. All the characters were vivid and the stories were hard to put down. Piercy has a way of establishing an emotional connection with characters that brings them to life and into your heart.

One sobering facet of this book is that it seems to me that we've made so little progress socially. For example, I love this excerpt and I think nearly every woman I know could say the same thing:

"After being married for nine years, it was a great relief to have frequent male companionship and sex without having to do his laundry, cook his meals, worry about his health, listen to his insecurities and in general provide upkeep and free therapy."

To think that women are still saying this fifty years after the feminist movement began is incredibly sad to me. But I'm so glad Piercy is still speaking out and in such an entertaining way.

Rebekah Anthony says

Her writing makes interesting points about human interaction from the perspective of women, although there was nothing that really grabbed my attention and made me want to read on. Not bad, not good, just meh.

Creolecat says

Have some candy while reading this book, because that's the only sweetness you'll get.

Most of these stories made me feel as if I had walked into the middle of a conversation and then was forced to be a part of it. Except for the story, *Saving Mother from Herself*, I felt indifferent to the characters. By the time I finished reading these stories, I was irritated.

In *Somebody Who Understands You*, a bitter male professor dispenses advice on the future to a couple of female students by stating they had nothing to look forward to but the five Ds: "dishes, daddy, diapers, discontent and then finally divorce." But he forgot a sixth D, *depressing*, which is what this collection is. There are some of us who feel there is more to life than this cynicism.

I'm giving this three stars only because Marge Piercy **is** a good writer.

The Beatles *Revolver* is mentioned in the story *The Border* so I had to go play it; it made me feel a little better.

LeeAnn says

This author is cynical. The only story I felt to be really insightful and heart endearing was about the woman hoarder. Still, even that felt flat. Her view of women's lives is fake, flawed. The cost of lunch . . . fitting title. No depth except in its eccentricity. I think I read it about as intended: dispassionate. Pitied the women but never felt for them. Definitely pitied them along with the author who must have a very unfulfilled life of real love that comes from commitment to people, not causes. And yet she writes about that very thing. I'll not read another one of hers.

I just spent some time looking at the cover, of one hummingbird preying on the other. That describes the short stories. All about one person preying on the other, failing to achieve real contact and love. Shifting from affair to affair, always trying to find real meaning, always failing to find it. I resent the idea that this is representative of a woman's lot in life.

Justin says

I received a copy from a Goodreads first reads giveaway.

22 short stories examine the lives of women with a feminist lens through modern day and as early as 1940s to 70s America. Most are fairly short, and kind of like autobiographical sketches.

“The Cost of Lunch, Etc.”

The title story explores the power dynamics between a young woman and aspiring poet invited to lunch with a professor and a famous poet.

“Saving Mother From Herself”

A hoarder gets an intervention from her daughter and becomes a TV spectacle when all she wants is to hold onto the life she wants to live—a compassionate look at the topic of hoarding.

“Going Over Jordan”

A young girl reflects on her religious upbringing and her friendship—a genuine struggle about finding oneself.

“Scars”

A trip to Cuba explores a woman’s modesty related to scars from helping others.

“She’s Dying, He Said”

A Jewish woman reflects on a fever she survived as a child, believed to have been saved by her grandmother’s prayers.

“Somebody Who Understands You”

An English teacher every girl looks up to guides a girl down a questionable route.

“Do You Love Me?”

A woman has to choose between marriage despite the possibility of her partner not loving her or her own feelings and wants.

“The Retreat”

A woman tries to find her own refuge in a cold marriage.

“What Remains”

This story explores two sisters, one dying from cancer and the gift of a family she gives.

“The Border”

A woman activist helps men avoid the draft for the Vietnam war by driving them to Canada.

“I Had a Friend”

A reflection of a friend who tried to find meaning in his life and the many things he tried—an existential tragedy.

“Ring Around the Kleinbottle”

Three women become enamored with a man who just dumped one of their old roommates.

“The Shrine”

A daughter reconciles with her mother nearing the end of her life, exploring her feelings and duties through the rest of her life and family.

“The Easy Arrangement”

Another story about an affair and the double standards women have.

“What the Arbor Said”

A widower captures a woman’s attention from her marriage.

“Fog”

A lesbian couple’s relationship changes when a partner has to cope with the other being diagnosed with Alzheimer’s.

“What and When I Promised”

A glimpse into post WWII of Jewish American culture and a girl’s promise to her grandmother.

“Little Sister, Cat and Mouse”

A story about two friends as close as sisters and conflicting over another guy and pregnancy.

“I Wasn’t Losing My Mind”

When her mother’s necklace goes missing, a daughter tracks down the thief.

“How to Seduce a Feminist (or Not)”

A pretty entertaining set of situations of feminists going on dates with men who seem compatible but turn out selfish and egotistical.

“The Secret of My Marriage”

A story of marriage in a village with religious undertones.

“What Is the Meaning of This?”

Another professor/writer in an open relationship takes interest in another woman.

While I enjoyed some of the characters, I noticed a “sameness” to many of the stories dealing with similar themes and experiences of writers, professors and men with huge egos. This made it difficult to find standouts and crappy ones, so it gave the quality an evenness. I also felt while these were great sketches and ideas, most of the stories covered a great length of time and backstory and led many to rely on telling (though the prose was fine). Overall, I did find the experiences conveyed in the collection enlightening about the experiences of women across different time periods.

Cristina says

Just a simple little book of short stories about women and the lives they lead. A pleasant and insightful read.

Linda Dubin says

I love Marge Piercy's books and her short stories were amazing.

Timothy Bazzett says

I have long been a fan of Marge Piercy's work. The last Piercy book I read was her literary memoir, *SLEEPING WITH CATS*, which I loved. Before that I had much enjoyed *SMALL CHANGES*, *GONE TO SOLDIERS* and *SUMMER PEOPLE*. I realize that this is only a small fraction of her prolific output, and now, having read her latest, a short story collection (her first) called *THE COST OF LUNCH, ETC.*, my appetite has been whetted for more of Piercy.

Because *THE COST OF LUNCH, ETC.* is a masterful, mesmerizing set of twenty stories, each one an absolute gem which left me wondering how Piercy is able to create such real, believable breathing characters in just a dozen pages or, often, even less. There is the eccentric widow, whose grown children see her as a 'hoarder' and whose thoughts and activities do indeed place her squarely into that category so recently exploited on cable TV ("Saving Mother from Herself"). And the middle-aged wife kissed by a neighbor, who wonders if her husband still cares, remembering a time when "he loved her till the ceiling went away and her eyes fell back in her head" ("What the Arbor Said"). In "Fog" a woman is confronted with her long-time partner's early onset Alzheimer's and thinks, "I have a child but she is growing backwards into babbling and then silence. But I made a commitment: partners for life."

Much is made in several of the (obviously autobiographical) stories here of Piercy's feelings about being a Jew in a non-observant family and how, as a small child, she loved visiting her Orthodox Jewish grandmother in Cleveland, where she accompanied her to temple and shul. In "What and When I Promised" the ten year-old narrator tries to comfort her grandmother Hannah, whose whole family was lost to the Holocaust, and tells her: "Grandma, I will always be a Jew. No matter what, I will remain a Jew so long as I live ... And I have kept that promise ever since."

In more than a few of these stories the narrator describes a distant father who wanted a son, and was disappointed at having a daughter. Reading these, I was suddenly reminded of a song from the seventies, Lori Jacobs' "Constant Disappointment" - "I've been a constant disappointment all my life/To the people in

my life/Who say they really care." And, in one of my everything-is-connected musings, I wondered if Jacobs had ever read Piercy, or if Piercy had ever heard Jacobs's song.

Bottom line: these are simply wonderful stories. **HIGHLY** recommended.

Ivy says

Worthy of a paced read. Great variety. Well written. **REAL** people with complicated lives and relationships.

Ariel says

My head has been swimming in the last two weeks, Piercy's *The Cost of Lunch, Etc.* kept me coming back regardless. Review to come!
