



A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You : Stories

By Amy Bloom

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Amy Bloom was nominated for a National Book Award for her first collection, **Come to Me**, and her fiction has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Story*, *Antaeus*, and other magazines, and in **The Best American Short Stories** and **Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards**. In her new collection, she enhances her reputation as a true artist of the form.

Here are characters confronted with tragedy, perplexed by emotions, and challenged to endure whatever modern life may have in store. A loving mother accompanies her daughter in her journey to become a man, and discovers a new, hopeful love. A stepmother and stepson meet again after fifteen years and a devastating mistake, and rediscover their familial affection for each other. And in "The Story," a widow bent on seducing another woman's husband constructs and deconstructs her story until she has "made the best and happiest ending" possible "in this world."

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

It was Henry James who first claimed the imagination of disaster, but in Amy Bloom's stunning second collection, she appears to have inherited the mantle. Most of the characters in *A Blind Man Can See How Much I Love You* are pursued by at least one of the biological furies: cancer, miscarriage, Parkinson's disease. And even those with their health intact tend to be sick at heart, having run the gantlet of family life and suffered what the military men like to call friendly fire. Yet the effect of these brilliant stories is anything but dreary. Instead they produce an odd sense of elation--Bloom somehow persuades us that her characters will continue under their own steam long after we've closed the book, and she alternates hope and hopelessness in exactly the right, recognizable proportions.

Take the title story, in which a middle-aged mother is determined to see her daughter through the rigors of a sex-change operation. Jane puts up a good front, almost but not quite earning the title of Transsexual Mom of the Year, and supports her "handsome boy-girl" every step of the way. Yet the strain shows. And when she meets a supernaturally nice man, she can't quite credit her good fortune--even his appearance at her door with an armload of flowers touches off a fresh round of ambivalence:

And standing on the little porch of the condo, barely enough room for two medium-size people and forty-eight roses, Jane sees that she has taken her place in the long and honorable line of fools for love: Don Quixote and Hermia and Oscar Wilde and Joe E. Brown, crowing with delight, clutching his straw boater and Jack Lemmon as the speedboat carries them off into a cockeyed and irresistible future.

The inclusion of *Some Like It Hot*'s Joe E. Brown, who's gotten both more and less than he bargained for in his cross-dressing sweetheart, is a typically marvelous touch. And lest we think that Bloom has weighted the scales too heavily in favor of disillusion, Jane's new lover gets in the last word, citing the South Carolina state motto: "*Dum spiro, spero....* While I breathe, I hope." Just keep breathing, the reader wants to say.

"Stars at Elbow and Foot" and "Rowing to Eden" are no less effective in their mingling of tragedy and sublime trivia. In two other stories, Bloom revives the Sampson clan, which she first introduced in *Come to Me*, and beautifully extends her mini-epic of mixed-race life without a grain of namby-pamby PC hesitation. And last but not least, there's "The Story," a tricky number in which Bloom seems to shoot to hell her own reputation for Chekhovian decency. Here we have a narrator who lies and dissembles, destroys her rival, and lives to tell the (metafictional) tale: "Even now I regard her destruction as a very good thing, and that undermines the necessary fictive texture of deep ambiguity, the roiling ambivalence that might give tension to the narrator's affection." In the end, though, Bloom is simply too gifted a writer to banish all seven types of ambiguity from her work. She understands that we are hopelessly divided creatures and cuts us the necessary, unsentimental slack. Or to put it another way, she forgives all--but forgets nothing. --*James Marcus*

From Publishers Weekly

Some of the power of her fiction (*Love Invents Us*, etc.) comes from Bloom's mastery of the writing craft; more arises from the empathy for human frailty exhibited by this author, who also works as a psychotherapist. Here, eight stories shed insight on the healing properties of love, experienced through unexpected epiphanies, ardent sacrifices and impulsive acts of forgiveness. Two tales concern a black man,

Lionel, who one shameful night long ago slept with his white stepmother, Julia. In "Night Visions," Julia attempts to heal Lionel's guilt with kindness: "I love you past speech," she says, as maternal earth-mother rather than temptress. But in "Light into Dark," set six years and Lionel's two divorces later, he still carries "a knot in his heart," so Julia succors Lionel's stepson instead. The narrator in "Stars at Elbow and Foot," the collection's most outstanding story, has lost her baby at birth. Her sardonic voice charts depthless despair, until she opens her heart to a stunted, armless little boy who's even more cynical about life and emotionally guarded about commitment than she is. Another suffering character is the teenaged narrator of "Hold Tight," furious that her smart, talented, beautiful mother is dying of cancer, bitter that her own youth is vanishing at the same time. Here, too, there is a quiet healing, administered by her bereaved father. The protagonist of the title story is a single mother who shepherds her cherished daughter through the teenager's keenly desired sex-change operation, and finds her own heart healing in the process. And even when the will to endure is merely a day-by-day triumph over despair, as in "The Story," Bloom invests her tales with numinous insights. 13-city author tour. (Aug.)

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From Library Journal

Bloom, a practicing psychotherapist, brings great insight into human emotion in this, her third, book (after *Love Invents Us*). Here, varieties of love are explored to great effect. In the title story, a mother assists as her beloved child becomes a female-to-male transsexual. Two stories explore relationships between adult men and their vividly rendered widowed stepmothers. Each of the stories in the collection contains unexpected scenes that deliver poignant moments of pure pleasure. Particularly moving is "Stars at Elbow and Foot," in which a woman tries to cope with the death of her newborn baby and forms a relationship with an armless orphan. This beautiful book will warm the hearts of its readers; recommended for all libraries.

-DJudith Kicinski, *Sarah Lawrence Coll. Lib., Bronxville, NY*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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