



After Rain

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William Trevor has long been acclaimed as one of the finest short story writers in the discipline, and these stories can only confirm his reputation. With deftly controlled narratives that often seem to have the density of novels, he penetrates the inner lives of his characters with razor-sharp insight, illuminating corners of their emotional lives that would normally lie completely hidden.

Some of these stories are chilling, such as “Lost Ground,” in which a Protestant boy in Northern Ireland believes he has seen a Catholic saint. He insists on telling everyone about it and is eventually locked up and then murdered with the connivance of his own family. Equally unsettling is “Gilbert’s Mother,” which tells of the anguish of a mother who knows that her adult son is “strange” and lives with her unspoken suspicion that when he is out of her sight he commits horrible crimes.

In a number of stories, Trevor traces the pathways by which the subterranean landscape of a marriage shifts for the worse, while leaving surface appearances intact. In “A Day” a wife knows that her husband is conducting a long-term affair, but she never confronts him with it because she convinces herself that the affair is his due, a fair price exacted for her failure to produce a child for him.

Even good marriages have a price. In “Timothy’s Birthday” a son refuses to return to his parents’ home for his birthday celebration. It transpires that the old couple’s long and happy marriage bred only jealousy in the son. It is as if unhappiness has to squeeze in somewhere, and if it cannot do so within a marriage, it will find some other point of entry.

Perhaps the most moving story of all is “After Rain,” a tale of redemptive grace centering around a painting of THE ANNUNCIATION. Unlike a typical Trevor story, which focuses on the accumulated weight of the past, this one offers the protagonist a sudden release from it. It is like a breath of pure air in a fictional universe that is often enclosed and forbidding.

Sources for Further Study

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