



Title: The Piano Tuner

Author: Peter Meinke

Description:

In *The Piano Tuner*, Peter Meinke writes of the foreignness that awaits us when we go abroad and when we answer our own front door to admit a stranger, that confronts us in unfamiliar cities and villages and in the equally disquieting surroundings of our memories and regrets.

Often in these stories, what seems a safe, comfortable environment turns suddenly threatening. In the title story, a writer's quiet existence amid his antiques and books is dismantled, piece by piece, by a demonic, beer-bellied piano tuner. In "The Ponoes," a man recalls how, as a young boy living in Brooklyn during World War II, he became a collaborationist in the brutal pranks of two Irish bullies. In "The Twisted River," the sedate collegiality of a Polish university is disrupted when an American on a Fulbright grant attempts to blackmail two faculty members. And in "The Bracelet," a young anthropology student doing field work in Africa finds herself drawn further and further into the role of a priestess of Oshun, into a life dictated by the configuration of cowry shells cast upon the floor.

Meinke writes of a world where our control over our lives seldom exists across a border, and often extends no further than our fingertips. Attempts to bridge two cultures, two lives are sometimes successful, as when an actor finds love in the arms of a tough-talking barmaid, but more usually lead to disillusionment, as when a hard-drinking salesman's career is shattered after he is drunk under the table one night by a Polish engineer, or when an English father struggles to find common ground with his American son. Riveting, almost terrifying, the stories in *The Piano Tuner* tell of decent men and women caught in events that they could never have predicted, would never have chosen.

Reviews

Library Journal:

This year's winner of the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction is very consistent in the high quality of its contents: there are no weak links among the 14 stories in the collection. Divided into two sections, "Home Thoughts" and "From Abroad", the stories share a haunting sense of disorientation, the characters surprised by the unfamiliar intruding into their comfortable settled lives. In the title story, selected for Best American Short Stories 1984, a writer's carefully tended home is invaded by a fat, beer-swilling piano tuner who grows increasingly threatening. Other stories feature cross-cultural disorientation: an American student spending her "Winter Term" in Paris, a visiting American scholar who threatens to blackmail faculty at a Polish university in "The Twisted River." This is storytelling at its best. Strongly recommended.

Washington Post Book World:

The Piano Tuner exhibits strong and consistent writing throughout. Meinke's poetic skill is evident in his ability to jar a reader with a single line ... He provides insight at arm's length, asking not necessarily that the reader care about the characters yet almost forcing him to understand them.