

A Good Day: And Other (Mostly) Humorous Stories and Lists

Radu Guia

FriesenPress

(216pp)

978-1-03-919494-6

Celebrating idiosyncratic lives with satire and wit, A Good Day is a diverse and enjoyable short story collection.

Radu Guia's peculiar and humorous short story collection *A Good Day* combines dialogues, emails, letters, and lists to intriguing effect.

These stories focus on characters who lead dynamic, determined, and kooky lives. A writer speaks with a man who claims that, to write well, you have to lead an interesting life; an angry letter is written to character John Hammond about the inception of Jurassic Park; and an "honest" rejection letter is penned through a standard form. Elsewhere, an HR representative asks "how being 'really good with a Frisbee' is relevant for this office job." Here and elsewhere, people think and speak their truths, for better or worse.

In settings including Bucharest, the Carpathian Mountains, and decrepit US cities, people's idiosyncrasies emerge: embassy employees' handshakes are weak, an eighth-grade bully is called the Cyclops, and someone retains the memory of the smell of a bear from a singular zoo trip. A list of twenty-five reasons the chicken crossed the road appears; so does a rundown of the similarities between a turnip and Bob. In one entry, a narrator recites the reasons they may give a one-star review to a book on Amazon. Some stories are drenched in irony: a self-proclaimed "reasonable man" wishes for an equestrian statue three times the natural size; an apology letter demeans and insults its recipient.

The book's humor is at various times subtle, dark, quippy, and laugh-out-loud funny, but its cleverness is consistent. Some of these absurdist character-driven stories oscillate between earnestness and satire, with plenty of space made for them to land securely on one side. And while the stories are not all directly connected to each other, there are hints throughout that they belong in the same universe—piquing allusions that form a curious throughline.

After their sardonic and satirical turns, though, the stories' conclusions range from thoughtful to merely biting. Indeed, some entries lean too far into their own irony: the plight of a fish called the yellow-bellied scumsucker asks for rivers to be "dirty once again"; a person rats out a neighbor for leaving their house more than once during COVID-19 lockdowns. Still, the themes and character arcs remain clear.

In the whimsical short story collection *A Good Day*, peculiar characters live in heightened states amid the challenges of the contemporary world.

NATALIE WOLLENZIEN (September 11, 2024)

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