

## Flies in Amber: Selected Stories

**Jonathan Land Evans**

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*The character-driven narratives collected in Flies in Amber grapple with lived complexities and the shadows of history.*

Jonathan Land Evans's short story collection *Flies in Amber* examines the intricate dance between history and identity. Spanning settings from America and England to Bermuda and the West Indies, the stories delve into the human experience, exploring themes of isolation, memory, and social shifts.

"Flies in Amber" crafts a reflective atmosphere around a rural lakeside gathering where the tension between social expectations and personal desires is palpable. The story's rich descriptions emphasize mood over plot, resulting in an immersive yet slow-paced experience that captures the delicate emotions of the characters. Contemplative, the story lingers on introspective moments, inviting reflection on unspoken yearnings.

"The Wife-beaters Club" shifts focus to suburban life, following Roy, a retired man who finds a peculiar solace in his garage, dubbed the "doghouse." Indeed, the garage is a metaphor for Roy's quiet rebellion against the confines of his past and the roles he played in it. The suburban setting underscores themes of masculinity and the struggle for self-definition, and Roy's contented yet constrained life highlights the complexities of finding comfort in solitude.

Darker themes consume "The Happy Reaper," whose protagonist revels in violence during a hotel shootout. With a satirical edge, the story critiques society's desensitization to brutality, mining its lead's detachment for commentary on the allure of violence in contemporary culture. Unsettling yet sharp, it's a thought-provoking piece that challenges conventional perceptions of heroism and villainy. In contrast, "The Prisoner of Kisses" focuses on the chaotic world of Broadway through exchanges between a brash producer and his entourage. Beyond its lighthearted approach, the tale exposes the superficiality of the entertainment industry with insights into compromises between art and commerce. Its portrayal of theatrical excess captures the spirit of a bygone era, though its narrative leans more on humor than depth. And "Seeing Things" mixes childhood innocence with subtle unease as a girl shares her fear of ghosts with her uncle, revealing the emotional weight of adapting to a new environment. Here, mist-shrouded imagery evokes an uncertainty that the adult's well-meaning yet clumsy attempts at comfort cannot assuage.

Throughout the collection, the prose is direct and clear, punctuated by moments of lyricism that bring the settings and characters to life. They evince attention to detail that makes even their distant settings tangible. In addition to being atmospheric, they are deep and diverse, with usually effective tonal shifts between dark humor and reflective melancholy.

The nuanced short stories in *Flies in Amber* blend humor, darkness, and introspection into their character-driven narratives which grapple with lived complexities and the shadows of history.

KHOLISWA MENDES PEPANI (November 1, 2024)

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