

the
VINTAGE
CONTEMPORARIES
reader



A C O M M E M O R A T I V E E D I T I O N

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O F T H E B E S T I N

C O N T E M P O R A R Y F I C T I O N

THE
VINTAGE
CONTEMPORARIES
READER

VINTAGE CONTEMPORARIES | VINTAGE BOOKS
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Yesterday's Discoveries, Today's Classics: An Introduction

IN THE LAST fourteen years, the earth traveled 353,230,940,000 miles around the sun; the population of the United States grew from 232,904,825 to 268,684,928. We've been through three presidents, and the Toronto Blue Jays and the Minnesota Twins won the World Series the most times. Back in 1984, Milos Forman's *Amadeus* won the Oscar for the Best Film. The number-one song was "When Doves Cry" by Prince and the Revolution, and Ronald Reagan was President. A puppy born back then would now be an elder statesman in the dog world.

And in 1984, a group of young, smart editors at a small imprint within a large publishing house started an enterprise called Vintage Contemporaries. The first list included Raymond Carver, Jay McInerney, Peter Matthiessen, and Thomas McGuane. The most recent list includes Charles Frazier, Amy Tan, and Alice Munro, not to mention all the outstanding books in between.

The volume you hold in your hand contains selections, in some cases complete stories, by some of the most talented writers of the century. From such undeniable classics as Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* and Frederick Exley's *A Fan's Notes* to the unique talent of Raymond Carver and Tobias Wolff, to some of our braver writers working the fringes of consciousness,

like Nicholson Baker, and Mark Leyner, to the stylistic brilliance of Kaye Gibbons and Sandra Cisneros. Not to mention—heck, I think I will mention, the sheer genius of the rest of the authors represented here, including Ann Beattie, Edwidge Danticat, Don DeLillo, Andre Dubus, Bret Easton Ellis, Richard Ford, Ernest J. Gaines, David Guterson, Michelle Huneven, Patrick McGrath, Steven Millhauser, Richard Russo, Sapphire, and Mona Simpson.

You might say the authors included herein represent much of the best that contemporary fiction has had to offer for the past fourteen years. As editor in chief of Vintage Books, I would take your saying that as an indication that you are a reader of great taste and enormous good fortune. Because, in this one volume, you have the opportunity to relive many of fiction's finest moments during this time period and perhaps to be turned on to some you may have missed.

This volume is an opportunity for those of us at Vintage to thank you for your support of our efforts to bring these authors to you.

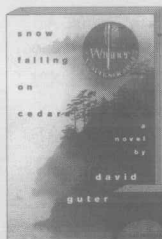
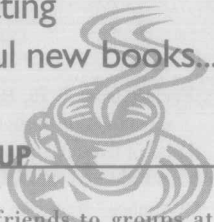
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Marty Asher
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679-46012-8	WOMEN WITH MEN, Ford ("Jealous," an unabridged story)	\$15.00a

CONTENTS

<i>Yesterday's Discoveries, Today's Classics: An Introduction</i> by Marty Asher, Editor in Chief of Vintage Books	vii
JAY MCINERNEY, from <i>Bright Lights, Big City</i> (1984)	3
FREDERICK EXLEY, "The Nervous Light of Sunday" from <i>A Fan's Notes</i> (1985)	11
RICHARD RUSSO, from <i>Mohawk</i> (1986)	24
RICHARD FORD, from <i>The Sportswriter</i> (1986)	34
MONA SIMPSON, "Anywhere" from <i>Anywhere But Here</i> (1988)	57
KAYE GIBBONS, from <i>Ellen Foster</i> (1988)	82
RICHARD YATES, from <i>Revolutionary Road</i> (1989)	92
DON DELILLO, from <i>The Names</i> (1989)	101
NICHOLSON BAKER, from <i>The Mezzanine</i> (1990)	111
BRET EASTON ELLIS, from <i>American Psycho</i> (1991)	126
PATRICK MCGRATH, from <i>Spider</i> (1991)	143
SANDRA CISNEROS, from <i>The House on Mango Street</i> (1991)	148
RAYMOND CARVER, "Why, Honey?" from <i>Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?</i> (1992)	152
ANN BEATTIE, "What Was Mine" from <i>What Was Mine</i> (1992)	158
MARK LEYNER, from <i>Et Tu, Babe</i> (1993)	171

THOMAS MCGUANE, from <i>Nothing But Blue Skies</i> (1994)	179
DAVID GUTERSON, "Piranhas" from <i>The Country Ahead of Us, the Country Behind</i> (1996)	189
EDWIDGE DANTICAT, "Between the Pool and Gardenias" from <i>Krik? Krak!</i> (1996)	206
TOBIAS WOLFF, "Mortals" from <i>The Night in Question</i> (1997)	213
ALICE MUNRO, "Wild Swans" from <i>Selected Stories</i> (1997)	224
ERNEST J. GAINES, "Three Men" from <i>Bloodline</i> (1997)	236
ANDRE DUBUS, "All the Time in the World" from <i>Dancing After Hours</i> (1997)	270
SAPPHIRE, from <i>Push</i> (1997)	283
STEVEN MILLHAUSER, from "The Little Kingdom of J. Franklin Payne" from <i>Little Kingdoms</i> (1998)	290
MICHELLE HUNEVEN, from <i>Round Rock</i> (1998)	297
JAY MCINERNEY, "How It Ended" from <i>Model Behavior</i> (1999)	308

Dates given in the Contents indicate the year of the first Vintage Contemporaries publication of each volume.

THE
VINTAGE
CONTEMPORARIES
READER

JAY MCINERNEY

from *Bright Lights, Big City*

No other novel set the tone for the harrowingly excessive 1980s quite like Jay McInerney's best-selling Bright Lights, Big City, and McInerney has since become a signature voice for his generation with such Vintage Contemporaries novels as Ransom, Story of My Life, Brightness Falls, and The Last of the Savages. Jay McInerney is currently working on a collection of stories entitled Model Behavior, forthcoming from Knopf.

■ IT'S SIX A.M. DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?

YOU ARE NOT the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might come clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. Then again, it might not. A small voice inside you insists that this epidemic lack of clarity is a result of too much of that already. The night has already turned on that imperceptible pivot where two A.M. changes to six A.M. You know this moment has come and gone, but you are not yet willing to concede that you have crossed the line beyond which all is gratuitous damage and the palsy of unraveled nerve endings. Somewhere back there you could have cut your losses, but you rode past that moment on a comet trail of white powder and now you are trying to hang on to the rush. Your brain at this moment is composed of brigades of tiny Bolivian soldiers. They are tired and muddy from their long march through the night.

There are holes in their boots and they are hungry. They need to be fed. They need the Bolivian Marching Powder.

A vaguely tribal flavor to this scene—pendulous jewelry, face paint, ceremonial headgear and hair styles. You feel that there is also a certain Latin theme—something more than the piranhas cruising your bloodstream and the fading buzz of marimbas in your brain.

You are leaning back against a post that may or may not be structural with regard to the building, but which feels essential to your own maintenance of an upright position. The bald girl is saying this used to be a good place to come before the assholes discovered it. You don't want to be talking to this bald girl, or even listening to her, which is all you are doing, but just now you do not want to test the powers of speech or locomotion.

How did you get here? It was your friend, Tad Allagash, who powered you in here, and he has disappeared. Tad is the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. He is either your best self or you worst self, you're not sure which. Earlier in the evening it seemed clear that he was your best self. You started on the Upper East Side with champagne and unlimited prospects, strictly observing the Allagash rule of perpetual motion: one drink per stop. Tad's mission in life is to have more fun than anyone else in New York City, and this involves a lot of moving around, since there is always the likelihood that where you aren't is more fun than where you are. You are awed by his strict refusal to acknowledge any goal higher than the pursuit of pleasure. You want to be like that. You also think he is shallow and dangerous. His friends are all rich and spoiled, like the cousin from Memphis you met earlier in the evening who would not accompany you below Fourteenth Street because, he said, he didn't have a lowlife visa. This cousin had a girlfriend with cheekbones to break your heart, and you knew she was the real thing when she steadfastly refused to acknowledge your pres-

ence. She possessed secrets—about islands, about horses, about French pronunciation—that you would never know.

You have traveled in the course of the night from the meticulous to the slime. The girl with the shaved head has a scar tattooed on her scalp. It looks like a long, sutured gash. You tell her it is very realistic. She takes this as a compliment and thanks you. You meant as opposed to romantic.

“I could use one of those right over my heart,” you say.

“You want I can give you the name of the guy that did it. You’d be surprised how cheap.”

You don’t tell her that nothing would surprise you now. Her voice, for instance, which is like the New Jersey State Anthem played through an electric shaver.

The bald girl is emblematic of the problem. The problem is, for some reason you think you are going to meet the kind of girl who is not the kind of girl who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. When you meet her you are going to tell her that what you really want is a house in the country with a garden. New York, the club scene, bald women—you’re tired of all that. Your presence here is only a matter of conducting an experiment in limits, reminding yourself of what you aren’t. You see yourself as the kind of guy who wakes up early on Sunday morning and steps out to cop the *Times* and croissants. Who might take a cue from the Arts and Leisure section and decide to check out an exhibition—costumes of the Hapsburg Court at the Met, say, or Japanese lacquerware of the Muromachi period at the Asia Society. The kind of guy who calls up the woman he met at a publishing party Friday night, the party he did not get sloppy drunk at. See if she wants to check out the exhibition and maybe do an early dinner. A guy who would wait until eleven A.M. to call her, because she might not be an early riser, like he is. She may have been out late, perhaps at a nightclub. And maybe a couple of sets of tennis before the museum. He wonders if she plays, but of course she would.