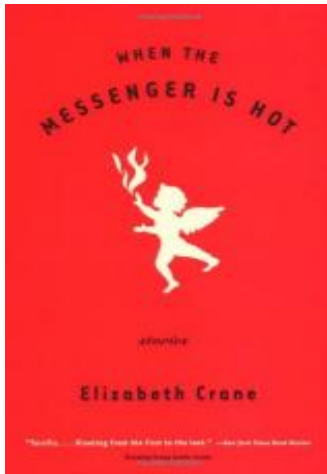


When the Messenger Is Hot: Stories

by Elizabeth Crane



About the Book

In tales everywhere hailed for their disarming humor and keen perception, Elizabeth Crane gleefully explores the absurdities and possibilities of modern urban life. The women in **When the Messenger Is Hot** are fierce and kind, damaged and optimistic. They are jilted lovers, absent daughters, Twelve-Steppers, and smart-asses. They experience love and loss in a way that is both uniquely theirs and universal.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think the author chose to open the collection with "The Archetype's Girlfriend"? Which of the character traits described in the story apply to you? Your friends?
2. What does "Something Shiny" say about identity? How easily can others "figure us out"? Do you think, like Apple Fowler, there is someone who might be able to live your life better than you?
3. How do the fantastical elements in "Privacy and Coffee," "Something Shiny," "Return from the Depot!" and "The Daves" help illustrate the characters' emotional lives? How do you think the stories might have played out in reality?
4. Why does the narrator in "Privacy and Coffee" become a recluse? Is it possible to completely cut oneself off from the world? Where would you set up camp if you could pick any place in the world? How long do you think you'd be happy there?
5. Why do you think the author chose to write "You Take Naps" and "When the Messenger is Hot" in the second person? How does this approach affect your understanding of the stories?
6. What do you think Alice is trying to express through her poem at the end of "An Intervention"? Is her poem good or

bad? Does it make a difference either way? How might the story be different without it?

7. Which character in the collection changes the most by the end of her story? Which character changes the least? Which character's decisions do you most agree with? Disagree with?

8. The concept of "denial" has left the therapist's office and entered mainstream conversation. Which stories in this collection deal with denial? Does the author seem wholeheartedly to condemn or endorse it?

9. Why do you think the author included so many footnotes in "The Super Fantastic New Zealand Triangle"? If you could footnote your life, what would need the most explaining?

10. In "Christina" is the ghost baby real or just a figment of the narrator's imagination? What does Christina represent?

Author Bio

I grew up in Manhattan on the Upper West Side in something of a musical family; my mother was an opera singer, my father is a musicologist, my stepdad manages classical musicians. (My stepmom, with a background in school psychology, is a Mediator and Mediation Trainer. But she can carry a tune too.) My own career as an opera singer (in the children's chorus at New York City Opera) was cut short by a massive case of stage fright before I hit fifth grade; it may or may not be coincidental that I'd taken up writing by this point, after having read *Harriet the Spy* (admittedly, at this point, a cliché, but it's true) when I was eight. In fifth grade they held a contest at school to write a caption for a photo of two pigs kissing ? "I've just met a girl named Maria!" won me ten dollars, which I still consider to be the beginning of my current career. (No need to point out how many decades passed before I would be financially compensated again for my literary achievements.) Fast forward X number of decades and X number of career missteps to a level of dissatisfaction significant enough to compel me to take a shot at some kind of actual career from my childhood passion. (Okay, I taught for a number of years, and that was fun, but I was unsurprisingly overworked and underpaid, and also trying to write in my spare time, which was somewhat nonexistent.)

Some of my favorite web sites are McSweeneys, Free Will Astrology (check it out ? I know nothing about astrology, but it's called Free Will for a reason, and the guy who writes them is very funny, but guaranteed they will freak you out), FreeTranslation.com (when you're bored, type a passage into any language, get the translation, and then translate it back ? guaranteed humor value. Found magazine (a site of found notes, lists, etc. that have a weirdly literary/arty feel), eBay (because you can never have too many Little Kiddles).

Favorite childhood books: **The Bad Child's Book of Beasts**, **From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler**, **The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear**, **The Phantom Tollbooth**. Now: anything by George Saunders, Ken Kalfus, David Foster Wallace, Rick Moody, Aimee Bender, Lydia Davis, Lorrie Moore. Recent favorite books include **The Feast of Love** by Charles Baxter, and **Dear Mr. President** by Gabe Hudson.

Elizabeth Crane's stories have appeared in *The Sycamore Review*, *Washington Square*, *Weep Daily*, *New York Stories*, *Book*, *The Florida Review*, and *Eclipse*. She lives in Chicago.

Critical Praise

"Though Crane's stories deal with serious issues - love, dishonesty, betrayal, grief, drinking, sadness-her tone displays polish, humor, and a delectable lightness. . . . The opening tale can only be described as a showstopper."

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