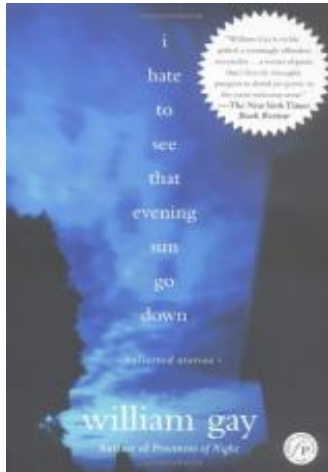

I Hate To See That Evening Sun Go Down: Collected Stories

by William Gay



About the Book

William Gay established himself as "the big new name to include in the storied annals of Southern Lit" (*Esquire*) with his debut novel, **The Long Home**, and his highly acclaimed follow-up, **Provinces of Night**. Like Faulkner's Mississippi and Cormac McCarthy's American West, Gay's Tennessee is redolent of broken souls. Mining that same fertile soil, his debut collection, **I Hate to See That Evening Sun Go Down**, brings together thirteen stories charting the pathos of interior lives. Among the colorful people readers meet are: old man Meecham, who escapes from his nursing home only to find his son has rented their homestead to "white trash"; Quincy Nell Qualls, who not only falls in love with the town lothario but, pregnant, faces an inescapable end when he abandons her; Finis and Doneita Beasley, whose forty-year marriage is broken up by a dead dog; and Bobby Pettijohn -- awakened in the night by a search party after a body is discovered in his back woods.

William Gay expertly sets these conflicted characters against lush backcountry scenery and defies our moral logic as we grow to love them for the weight of their human errors.

Discussion Guide

1. In the collection's title story, Meecham returns home after a stint in a nursing home. Discuss what appears to be a class rivalry between Meecham and Lonzo Choat. Do you believe Meecham is really a threat or merely a harmless old man? Is Meecham's son, Paul, justified in sending his father to a home?

2. In the story "A Death in the Woods," the body that is discovered on Pettijohn's property disturbs him immensely, while his wife, Carlene, appears quite indifferent. Does her dismissive attitude seem suspicious to you? Do you think Pettijohn suspected something from the start? What do you make of Pettijohn and Carlene's relationship?
3. The narrator in "Bonedaddy, Quincy Nell, and the Fifteen Thousand BTU Electric Chair" says that Bonedaddy "met his comeuppance" when he met Quincy Nell. Did Bonedaddy get what he deserved? Was Quincy Nell justified? Why do you suppose Bonedaddy was allowed to get away with so much?
4. Many of William Gay's characters in this collection have wonderfully colorful names. Why do you suppose "The Paperhanger" is never given a name beyond this moniker?
5. In "The Man Who Knew Dylan," Crosswaithe is a complicated character with a varied past. How have women shaped Crosswaithe's past, present, and future?
6. In "Those Deep Elm Brown's Ferry Blues" Alzheimer's is setting in on Scribner. Discuss the ways in which his mental deterioration is made manifest.
7. In "Crossroads Blues," the main character, Karas, encounters a curious man named Borum who claims that "everything has its price." How does this dictum relate to the story as a whole?
8. In the story "Closure and Roadkill on the Life's Highway," do you think Raymer, the jilted husband, finally gets the "closure" he admits he needs? Do you think old man Mayfield is telling the truth about the money? If not, then what are his motives for creating the tale?
9. In "Sugarbaby," Finis and Doneita Beasley have been happily married for thirty years. Finis shoots his wife's dog and does nothing to stop her when she leaves the next day. Why do you think he is so indifferent? What comment does it make about their marriage? Was Finis really happy or just going along with the routine?
10. Bender, the protagonist in "Standing by Peaceful Waters," has a recurring dream in which there is a ravenous wolf. What does the wolf represent? Discuss the wolf's symbolic role in the story. How do Bender's dreamworld and reality blur?
11. In "Good 'Til Now," Vangie finally decides to leave her husband on the day her lover, Robert Vandaveer, turns up dead. Do you think Vangie will still have the courage to leave? Robert credits fate with his meeting Vangie. What role does fate ultimately play in the story?
12. In "The Lightpainter," Tidewater gets his name from the ability to capture light in his paintings. In what other ways does this name suit him? Why do you think he takes such a liking to Jenny? Does Tidewater have a superhero complex?
13. When Angie parks the car in a seedy neighborhood in Nashville in the story "My Hand Is Just Fine Where It Is," Worrel worries that "at any moment everything could alter." Discuss how this statement seems to describe the nature of their relationship.

14. Of the collection, what is your favorite story? Who is your favorite character? Why?

15. What themes do you notice appear throughout the collection of stories?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

"Every story is a masterpiece...in the Southern tradition of Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, and William Faulkner."

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