



## Train Shots

*Vanessa Blakeslee*

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## **Train Shots** Vanessa Blakeslee

A single mother rents a fundamentalist preacher's carriage house. A pop star contemplates suicide in the hotel where Janis Joplin died. A philandering ex-pat doctor gets hooked on morphine while reeling from his wife's death. And in the title story, a train engineer, after running over a young girl on his tracks, grapples with the pervasive question—what propels a life toward such a disastrous end?

## **Train Shots Details**

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Author : Vanessa Blakeslee

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# From Reader Review Train Shots for online ebook

## Franklin Ross says

Really great stories that you'll want to return to. "Don't Forget the Beignets" is particularly colorful and strikes close to home. Reading it, the details are so vivid that I almost felt like I was there, at the hotel in New Orleans as Alan, the bumbling con man, gets arrested by the FBI, except of course the story is told from the point-of-view of a young woman. The story jogged something in my mind, a Starsky-and-Hutch personal experience from a few years back. That said, she writes male characters very well.

Can't wait for this author's novel to hit the stands next year. I'll be first in line to pre-order.

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## Nathan Holic says

Though I've seen Blakeslee read on a number of occasions, I'd never read her stories on the printed page. (Well, maybe one or two, here and there. A couple online. My memory is terrible. Where was I?)

And honestly, it was awesome to read this collection, to see the stories she'd assembled from a much wider body of work. The cover of this book is perfect, evoking as it does the stereotypical female "shoe novel" (as my wife calls them), but hinting at a female voice and at subject matter far from expected.

I do think that the book is stronger in the second half than the first, and I absolutely loved the title story, but my opinion is probably skewed by the fact that I'd heard Blakeslee read selections from the early half of the book, and so they didn't seem as "new" to me. I like new things.

In any case, Train Shots is truly a stunning and memorable debut, the kind of book you'll want to give away as soon as you're done reading (in a good way, to share the voice and stories, to have someone else to talk about it with). But then again, you'll also want to have it on your bookshelf. So. Conundrum.

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## Jon says

Having only an electronic version of this one--a copy of the galleys given to me by the author for review--I've take a long while to read it through. I read on buses, on breaks, on street corners, in restaurants, on park benches, on sofas, in bed, anywhere I can manage. I don't read so much on computers--and certainly not much since taking on a family and moving to a new office that is not conducive to lunch-time reading at a computer screen. So I was not able to rip through Blakeslee's book with the kind of speed that a collection such as this would normally lend itself to: easy, fun reading.

Blakeslee's tales are of an expected variety--that is, there isn't a lot of experimentation here, and they didn't really leave me with much to ponder at the end of each one. But they accomplish what they do well.

After a fun lead-in short short about work relations, Blakeslee's collection settles in traditional faire. Most of the stories revolve around loss in some way--people searching for something, be it more to a relationship that is going bad or already has, a place to call home, or simply peace.

The strongest story in the collection, for me, is "Barbecue Rabbit," a tale about a mother and her mentally disturbed son. Reading about how this mother tries to cope is heartbreaking and horrifying.

"Uninvited Guests" focuses on a poor woman whose is forced to live under the surveillance of a religious landlord and to lie in order to continue a lifestyle to her liking. "Hospice of the Au Pair" focuses on a man whose wife dies and who has to deal also with the concurrent guilt of having a baby by another woman. "The Sponge Diver" focuses on the loss of a birth-control device amid the closing of a relationship. "Don't Forget the Beignets" is about a woman in over her head as her husband is carted away to prison for supposed financial misdeeds. And the title story at the end of the collection tells of a man dealing with the deaths he comes across (literally runs over) as a train engineer.

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## Jason Pettus says

(Reprinted from the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography [cclapcenter.com]. I am the original author of this essay, as well as the owner of CCLaP; it is not being reprinted illegally.)

Regular readers know that I find it difficult to write reviews of short-story collections -- the shortness of each piece makes it hard to do a really good analytical look at the book as a whole, while the nature of such collections means that some pieces might be great while others are terrible -- and Vanessa Blakeslee's *Train Shots* is a great example of what I'm talking about. Not particularly great nor particularly terrible, these slice-of-life character-heavy pieces sometimes are long and engaging, sometimes tiny and that barely make a blip on the consciousness; and like most story collections I review here, it comes recommended for those who are already a fan of the author, but can be easily skipped by those who aren't. A middle-of-the-road score to reflect the uneven nature of story collections in general, some of these pieces deserve a higher score than this, while others deserve a lower one, averaged out in the end as a symbol for me shrugging my shoulders once finished and saying to myself, "Meh."

Out of 10: **7.5**

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## Thing Two says

Vanessa Blakeslee asked me to review this short story collection of hers. Something about needing 50 Amazon reviews to make it to the next marketing level. I dragged my feet. I hate that feeling of having to say something nice about a book, just because you happen to know the author. Okay, I don't **have** to say something nice about *Train Shots: Stories*. I **want** to say something nice about it. I want you to go right out and buy yourself a copy of this excellent collection of short stories! It's that good. No, really!

A few of the stories are set in my home town, so there was an immediacy I felt that you might not get, but I promise you the first story will suck you in. It's about a waitress' first day on the job. Funny, cringe-worthy, with a unique voice all in one story.

My favorite story is the one about the dogs in Costa Rica. I'd tell you the title, but I left my copy in Charlotte last weekend with my girlfriend. You'll know it when you get to it. Be prepared!

While I was reading the stories, I learned that this book has been optioned for a feature film. How cool is

that? So, you see, Vanessa probably didn't need my review on Amazon -- this book is finding its way on its own merit -- but I'm so glad I got to read it before the movie for a change!!!

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### **Justin Tyner says**

"Except everyday at dawn he poured that spaciousness in which he drifted over himself like a pitcher of water, while I pushed the pitcher away". I wish the whole book was this sentence. The difference between characters you don't really get to know the connection of. It seems each separate story, minus the pop star one, could be novel and the reader gets a glimpse of that novel. The author has a talent and I would read her next book and hope the talent will be revealed. Congratulations Vanessa! Hilltop rep rep.

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### **sarah morgan says**

Fabulous, fabulous, fabulous collection of short stories. Blakeslee's perception of people and their life dilemmas is razor sharp. Her characters are complex and conflicted, all looking for some sort of fulfillment or a cure for a chronically broken heart. She is an immensely talented writer with a distinctive, new voice, who also has a knack for twisting the story; often the last line or two takes a turn in an unanticipated direction—rather like life. This is a stellar collection of short stories. Top notch writing! But don't listen to me blather on about it, go read the collection for yourself.

[Read my full review on The Internet Review of Books, here: <http://internetreviewofbooks.blogspot...>]

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### **Irene says**

Incredible collection. Each one of these stories drew me into its world and characters so deeply. Stunning writing and powerful insight into beautiful and screwed up humans.

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### **Amichai Shalev says**

I've read it last week, and it's got some of the most brilliant, hurt-breaking stories i have read in last couple of years (specially, "Ask Jesus", "The Lung" and "Train Shots") and although it's her first book, and she's really very young, she writes like she's already published dozens of books. Her dialog are sharp and funny, and she got this rare and unique talent to peak special dramatic moment of human behavior and transforming them in to art. and the most "frightening" thought of all - she will only get better

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### **Lauren O'Regan says**

From its opening pages, "Train Shots" serves up a candid collection of characters whose struggles—as ordinary as they are bizarre, as beautiful as they are painful—make for great fiction and profound truths.

Blakeslee's stories are like dramatic snapshots, each one a colorful glimpse of our sordid and vibrant humanity. Clean, compelling, and honest, "Train Shots" deserves a prominent spot on the contemporary reader's bookshelf.

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### **Valerie Rose says**

This collection arouses our emotions throughout the varied circumstances of each character, drawing us into the conflicts that swallow them up. The writer is able to put you in the shoes of every day people with their life struggles. For instance, for those who have worked in both the front and back of the house in the restaurant business, "Clock-In" portrays a very real scenario of what it is like to train a new recruit while developing a rapport with that person, in a very funny but also unflinching manner. I'm very much looking forward to the release of this author's novel next year.

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### **Janae says**

You could devour Vanessa Blakeslee's first collection of short stories, Train Shots from The Burrow Press Review in one sitting, but that would be like slamming eleven shots in one hot gulp—even with an assortment of short story chasers, the warmth from the last short will burn in your throat. . .

Read my full review at The Boiler Journal: <http://theboilerjournal.com/2014/06/2...>

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### **Paul says**

Another fine collection of short stories, a bit short at only 144 pages. Can't complain since I'm a library guy, but if I were buying I'd go for the Kindle version. Blakeslee is certainly an author to watch. I predict she will be writing a best selling novel before long. She's great on research, settings, action and all the other essentials. Not all of her characters are lovable, but most of them feel original. I liked the title story best, even though I grew up in a railroad town and had a railroad conductor for a father-in-law, and don't remember anyone quite as sensitive and decent as Blakeslee's engineer. She has a knack for creating characters who are not, thank God, simply herself in disguise. Some of them are disagreeable in the same way some of our best friends are disagreeable, in other words human. I'm stuck between three and four stars on this one. I think, if some of the stories had been more developed, I would go with the four. Still recommending it as something fresh and unique. I'll say it again; watch out for this author!

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### **Sharon says**

In "Train Shots" and other stories in this elegantly written collection, narrators and protagonists struggle with life-altering decisions, trying personal circumstances, and complicated loved ones. Readers who relate to stories that capture the emotional travails of contemporary life will find themselves reflecting on (and reflected in) Vanessa Blakeslee's short fiction.

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**John Fleming says**

I was privileged to get a copy of this book before the official release date, and it came to me with excellent blurbs and word-of-mouth recommendations. It's no empty hype. Blakeslee writes with beautiful clarity about lives as disparate as a suicidal "princess of pop" and a grieving train engineer. She inhabits places as varied as Costa Rica, L.A., Pennsylvania, and Florida. Her sleight-of-hand is so deft, her stories so convincingly and confidently rendered, they sneak up on you and break your heart when you least expect it. I highly recommend this smart and entertaining collection. Blakeslee's is a new voice that demands to be heard, and she'll be writing and publishing for years to come.

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