



Fancy Strut

Lee Smith

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Speed, Alabama, is frantically preparing for the event of a lifetime: Sesquicentennial Week. And all her proud citizens are kicking up their heels in a lively, pompous fancy strut....

Fancy Strut Details

Date : Published September 29th 1996 by Ballantine Books (first published 1973)

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Author : Lee Smith

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From Reader Review Fancy Strut for online ebook

Margaret says

I usually love Lee Smith's books...this was a quirky story about odd folks. It was first published in 1973...not her best!

Tommyb says

Fiction

Laine says

Great start but in the end only satisfactory. This time the author herds a small Southern town full of disparate characters through a sesquicentennial celebration. Even the cover picture is a miss, as a Fancy Strut is certainly not a youngish girl in a flowery dress reaching for the sky in a summery field.

Rebecca says

Lee Smith is really the perfect author to read after a semester of grading is over with, and summer is just beginning. This novel did not disappoint, but it also did not stand out as her best work.

Packed with Smith's familiar cast of characters -- quirky and semi-crazy small towners -- this story is just delightful. Using a rotating omniscient point of view, Smith expertly weaves in and out of different characters' perspectives.

I'm intrigued by the way she is able to switch from one character's close pov to another character's close pov in the same scene. I think she succeeds in doing so because she spends a good amount of time in one character's head before switching, and she almost never switches back within the same chapter/scene, so we don't feel cheated.

This is also a neat plot because we know that all of the characters' individual conflicts are building up to the overall conflict of the sesquicentennial celebration. I do wish Smith had spent less time describing the extravagant event itself and more time describing each character's resolutions within this event, but overall, it was a satisfying ending.

A light read with fun character development makes this book a success. While I can't say I lost myself in the plot, I certainly enjoyed the ride.

Rebecca Brothers says

I've been lucky enough to see Lee a few times. She never fails to have a grin, a mischievous grin, plastered on her face, like she's laughing at you and with you all at once. And I see why in this book. Fancy Strut is a TRIP. Smith takes us inside the world of Speed, Alabama to see how they will celebrate their Sesquicentennial Week (that's 150 years young, for those of you not up on your Latin roots). This is sometimes in the 1960's, and the Ladies-who-Lunch crowd figures prominently in this tale of seduction, segregation, and baton twirling.

Two of the main characters are high school rivals, two majorettes who compete in the Susan Arch Finlay Memorial Marching Contest at the University in Tuscaloosa. Their mothers are cousins and rivals, as well, and a wonderful scene unfolds as the girls "Fancy Strut" it with all their hearts. At a recent reading, Smith explained that she used to be a journalist for a paper in Alabama in the 1960's and covered this very real competition. She interviewed Miss Fancy Strut, newly crowned, by asking her, "Well, what does it feel like to be Miss Fancy Strut?" to which the real girl exclaimed, "This is the happiest moment of my life!" The irony of this was not lost on Smith, who then concocted this twirling tale about Speed. I loved how each of the characters seems so ordinary from the outside and how Smith delves into their twisted personal thoughts. Many of them reflect along the lines of, "I think I'm going completely crazy." The closeness, the smallness of the town presses in on you from every side--everyone knows everyone's intimate business. And then this celebration seems to be the breaking point. People from all walks of life choose this very event, full of community pageantry, civil duty, bunting and marching bands, to break with their molds. They have reckless affairs, they send criminal threats, they all go a little bit nuts and seem heartrendingly and hilariously aware of it.

Renee CK says

I am still processing this one. There is so much going on, just the kind of stuff I love.

Diana says

This didn't come close to Lee Smith's other books.

Alice says

My mother is from Alabama and though I live in New England, I have strong southern roots. I like Smith's books very much, but this one is a little lightweight. She uses humor with skill. Her characters ring true. She has the small town Alabama milieu down. I did find it really annoying that the book, published by Ballantine Books, was riddled with copyediting errors - such as "litle" and quite a few wrong word choices or missing words. To me this is unacceptable. Smith deserves better. Hire a decent copy editor, Ballantine!

Katharine says

I adored On Agate Hill, the first novel I read by her, so quickly bought this one & read it but was sorely disappointed. Nothing wrong with it, but neither clever nor exciting.

I would not recommend Fancy Strut at all.

I also bought one called something about Linen -- I've got high hopes for that one.

Stephy says

This is actually a very funny book. I like the story line so far, and look forward to the rest of the story. Some of the characters are really humorous, in a twisted way.

Martha says

So far, I am enjoying this much more than Lee Smith's Last Girls. This is a good portrayal of a Southern town, including some of the smugness and racism to be found in such places as Speed, Alabama, the setting.

This still gets a 3 after finishing it. Lee's characters are just not fully realized and seem like stock characters rather than real people.

Ruth says

1973 novel, set in Speed, AL (not an Appalachian novel) / preparations for Sesquicentennial Week / a character study of suburban Alabama in the late 1960s

nobody happy in Speed, AL

Ashley says

Very different from Lee Smith's other works. This novel follows a cast of characters in a small Alabama town through their preparations for a Sesquicentennial celebration in the early 60's. The novel appears at first to be a feel good look at the town's nostalgic present, but it turns quickly into a A.M. Holmes style novel where everything is falling apart with dark overtones. I liked the characters in this novel a lot, but you have to get all the way through this book to really "get it."

Alexis says

Very funny, and an interesting contrast to Lee Smith's more recent works, like *On Agate Hill*.

Julie says

As a majorette, the title of this book caught my eye, and I laughed when majorettes are actually in the book as well!

* * * * *

May 18th - I finished the book last night - I will tell you that it was difficult to get through. The book had a ton of potential as a fascinating small town of characters, but it fell flat. Not to mention that the majorettes were displayed in a very unfavorable light! ha! Some of the story lines interested me, but most didn't, and I was expecting this outrageous climax at the end as the book tried to build, but it was disappointing.

I typically enjoy the Southern Gothic novels, but this one failed to keep my interest, especially when I had several other books on my nightstand that were awaiting me...
