



Earthly Possessions

Anne Tyler

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"To read a novel by Anne Tyler is to fall in love."

PEOPLE

Charlotte Emory has always lived a quiet, conventional life in Clarion, Maryland. She lives as simply as possible, and one day decides to simplify everything and leave her husband. Her last trip to the bank throws Charlotte's life into an entirely different direction when a restless young man in a nylon jacket takes her hostage during the robbery--and soon the two are heading south into an unknown future, and a most unexpected fate....

Earthly Possessions Details

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From Reader Review Earthly Possessions for online ebook

Ali says

This is really a charming and poignant novel. Like so many other Anne Tyler novels I have read it is the wonderful characters she creates that make it so memorable. What was most interesting to me was Charlotte's view of herself, and how she views her childhood. Both Charlotte and Jake have an obsession with the past, Jake's memories of his friend Oliver bringing him up short when he is suddenly brought face to face with a 26 year old married man he no longer recognises, Charlotte with the idea that she was somehow accidentally switched with another baby at the hospital when she was born. The ending was nice, and seemed to wrap things up in just the right way.

Sara says

3.5 stars, rounded down.

Anne Tyler can take quirky, oddball, and unorthodox and turn it into familiar, approachable, and honest in the course of a 250 page novel. It is one of her strengths. You begin, seeing her characters as goofier than you, apart from the norm, and you end by seeing them as very human, even a bit of a kindred spirit.

Charlotte Emory is about to leave her husband when she is unexpectedly abducted by a bank robber. For most of us, a gun in our side and being forced into a car with an unknown man would be crippling, for Charlotte it is almost an adventure, at last. What it actually becomes is an opportunity for Charlotte to consider her life in a different light, and while she learns more about herself, so do we.

This is not one of her best works, but it felt very familiar to me (without feeling predictable) and I enjoyed reading it. Nice break from the disappointments I have had lately. A break to regroup and consider the next step...we all need that from time to time.

Bev says

A paperback copy of this book was given to me by one of my favorite college professors, Barbara Mallonee, after I finished a writing course with her. She wrote a note in it saying that from what she knew of me, she thought I would like the writing of Anne Tyler. I have to thank her for introducing me to Anne and for being such a wonderful, inspiring teacher. She is one of the role models I used when I decided to become a teacher myself.

Cathryn Conroy says

Anne Tyler creates characters that are so well-developed they seemingly pop off the page and inhabit your

life. When her characters sing, you can hear them; when they cry, you want to hand them a tissue; when they laugh, you can't help but feel their joy. This is the genius of Anne Tyler. Short on plot (who needs it?), this book resonates through all its quirky characters, as seen through the eyes of Charlotte Emory. Her husband, their two children, her mother, the husband's three brothers and assorted others who come and go all live in one house that is located between a Texaco and Amoco in Clarion, Maryland. Charlotte is taken hostage in a botched bank robbery and hustled off in stolen cars to Florida. The chapters switch between the story of her life in Clarion and the story of being a hostage. I adore Anne Tyler's books. No one writes like she does! This is a reader's treat--so go ahead and treat yourself to this book.

Zoeytron says

Earthly Possessions was published in 1977. It is refreshing to read a book that is not set in the past, yet is without references to our modern conveniences because they simply weren't around yet. No GPS, no texting, no cell phones, nary a microwave in sight.

Charlotte Emory has felt trapped pretty much all of her life. Growing up with her mother sighing and complaining that her own baby was switched with the wee baby Charlotte shortly after birth, it's not much of a reach to think she felt as though she didn't belong there. Now, at age 35, Charlotte has never really shaken the idea that she should be living some other life. She doesn't really love her husband, 'a towering hat rack of a man, gaunt and cavernous and haunted looking'. Her caregiving duties have finally come to an end with her mother's death. Charlotte is ready to make the break and leave. Popping into the local bank to withdraw some running away money (remember - no ATMs!), her getaway is thwarted when she is taken hostage by a bank robber and hustled out of the bank into his car. Trapped again.

A stop made at an old-fashioned Woolworth's 5 & 10 brought back memories with the mention of the old creaky wooden flooring, the smell of popcorn permeating the air, glass counters sporting the likes of Spray-Net hairspray, harlequin reading glasses, eyelash curlers, and mustard seed pendants. Not to be forgotten is the soda fountain complete with waitress and those glass cases of candy and hot salted cashews and peanuts, ready to be scooped and weighed by the clerk and handed to you in a little white paper bag.

It is the eccentricities of Anne Tyler's characters that draw me in and keep me there. The rather dismal aura that many of her stories display is here, familiar and comfortable.

Amy says

I picked this up at the library because I had read and liked several of Anne Tyler's more recent novels, but hadn't read any of her older ones. I read this one in just a couple of days, and enjoyed it. In every single Anne Tyler novel I've read, the plot/theme/central idea is pretty much the same: main character--always with an offbeat life, and surrounded by an offbeat collection of characters--is dissatisfied and unfulfilled in her life, undergoes some sort of life-changing experience, and comes to realize that her life, and the collection of characters in it, are fulfilling, after all. And for some reason, I never get tired of it...I suppose because it's all about the journey to self-awareness and learning to appreciate what you have, and that never really gets old.

Susan says

Oh, Anne Tyler, you are a genius. Characters that breathe into you off the page, you almost feel like a voyeur, peering into the details of their lives. Charlotte, an unhappy preacher's wife, tired of the clutter in her home - not only does she have all of her mother-in-law's furniture, but her husband's untethered brothers, hard cases from the church needing charity, including a young baby boy, and the detritus of her late father's photography business. She has longed for escape, and one day she decides to go to the bank to get the money she needs to leave, when she is taken hostage in a bank robbery. The narrative moves back and forth from the present hostage situation to how she ended up in her current, stifling life. I can't shake the characters - it's as if I've known them for a long time and feel attached. That's Tyler at her usual best. Long waitlist for her latest, *A Spool of Blue Thread*. Can't wait!

Glenn Sumi says

Another lovely, observant Anne Tyler novel.

One day, 30-something Charlotte decides to walk out on her marriage and, while at the bank to withdraw money for her trip (where?), she's taken hostage by escaped prisoner Jake, who's got his own relationship issues and wants to set them straight.

What follows is a sly road comedy that - even if it feels implausible - is deeply wise about guilt, avoidance and accepting one's course in life.

As usual, Tyler has great affection for her characters, warts and all.

I'm looking forward to reading some more of Tyler's backlist – *Morgan's Passing*, *Celestial Navigation* - before moving forward and reading the recent *A Spool Of Blue Thread*.

Dinner At the Homesick Restaurant and *The Accidental Tourist* are still my favourites, but she's so consistently good. People might argue that she writes about the same things, but when I think back to the 7 or 8 books of hers I've read I can remember them, especially her characters and their situations, vividly.

Louise Muddle says

How have I not read any Anne Tyler before? Beautifully constructed slightly odd narrator Charlotte Emory. Wonderful inciting incident grabs you from the off. Loving kind characters even the bank robbers - she finds the humanity in everyone. Sometimes very funny and poignant at the same time. Felt like a long time ago but then Mindy's reference to Elton John made me realise it's set in the late seventies I think. Kept thinking lots of the sections in Charlotte's past were standalone short stories. Only 200 pages but so much in them. Not a word wasted. Thankfully she has written masses of novels and I can start working through them!

Tania says

This is my fourth Anne Tyler novel, and although I liked it a bit better than *The Tin Can Tree*, it is still not on par with *Breathing Lessons* or *The Accidental Tourist*. I somewhat liked the character of Charlotte, but she wasn't as sympathetic to me as other Tyler heroines. I could, however, relate to her dissatisfaction with life - I just wished she'd do more, be more proactive, and not complain so much.

That said, Tyler give a clear glimpse into her family life, which made it possible to comprehend how she'd become the person she was, even if I found her hard to put up with in long doses. I was interested in her marriage and family life.

What I wasn't interested in was the subplot with Jake, the bank robber. This angle to the novel was so far fetched that it kept me from fully embracing the story. If Jake and his girlfriend were more well rounded characters, I might've cared more about that subplot. In general, I found that the book should've been longer. The fact that the book was so short made it difficult for Tyler to fully explore the differing points of view of the various characters, which she does to full effect in *Breathing Lessons*.

In short, this is a good, not great book. If you've never read Tyler's work before, I wouldn't start with this book - I doubt you'll fully grasp the level of her talent. This book is more for hardcore Tyler fans who, like me, are determined to read all her books, just on principle.

Lara says

A bored housewife is kidnapped and goes on a road journey with her young hopeless kidnapper. Well-written, and I appreciated the bleak humour, but all the characters are so passive, stupid, barely functioning that I found this a depressing unenlightening read.

Jax says

"My idea of a perfect day," I told him, "is an empty square on the calendar. That's all I ask."

So says Charlotte, a woman who'd like to shed all the clutter in her life, and that includes the people too. Charlotte's life hasn't turned out the way she had hoped, although she never exactly had any big plans either. Now she dreams of being unencumbered and free to do what she wants, answerable to no one but herself.

That's a premise I think most of us can identify with, at least at low points, but I felt less connected to these characters, saw less of my life in them than I usually do with a Tyler novel.

There are flashes of the Anne Tyler I love, in the descriptions that are just so exactly right that they paint a clear picture in our minds or remind us of a feeling we've known before, but it was a bit too gloomy and lacking in the humor and warmth of Tyler's later works for me to totally enjoy this.

NOTE: I hate the look and feel of these Ballantine editions. This is the second one I've read in my efforts to go back and read the early books that I missed, but I'll buy used copies of older editions for the rest.

Sonja says

I almost put this one down a couple of times... Don't know if I was disturbed by the fact that Charlotte was so passive, or the fact that I was seeing more and more of her traits in my life.

Glad I saw it through to the end. once again Anne Tyler is a wonderful writer and pulls you in to her characters... whether you like them or not.

This book has made me look at my life in a whole new light. I too am a 'coaster'. I coast by daily, letting others push or pull me in the direction that suits them. To me it's just easier to let someone else steer my life. Reading this book has made me a little more aware of my coasting and I know I need to take charge of my life in general and stop asking people 'what do you want to do today' or 'what do you want for supper' etc... But let's face it. I know I probably won't.

At least I can escape into a different life every time I pick up a book!

<http://www.bookcrossing.com/journal/7...>

Zuberino says

"The marriage wasn't going well and I decided to leave my husband."

So begins Anne Tyler's story of a woman named Charlotte, 35, from a small town in Maryland, sometime in the mid-1970s. A tale of ordinary people, with all the strengths and limitations that implies. Tyler has been ploughing this soil for well on 40 years now, and this is one of her earlier works, her seventh novel. Admittedly, she is no Updike - not such a showy stylist at any rate (but then who is?) - nonetheless, her prose has a cool, quiet artistry. Charlotte Emory is kidnapped by a young ne'er-do-well at the bank counter, and on their hasty flight south to Florida in a stolen car (the passenger-side doors locked with chains), she looks back upon the entirety of her prosaic life. Her parents' unhappy marriage, father a gloomy studio photographer, mother an ailing Zeppelin of a woman, her childhood spent in dreams of flight from her narrow circumstances. How that dream comes crashing to pieces, less than an hour after she has left home for college, forcing her to return to Clarion, MD and the inescapable parental home. Her subsequent marriage to the returned soldier Saul Emory (who later turns preacher), part of the large Emory brood and their flamboyant matriarch Alberta. All while, in the present, Charlotte is continuing her unreal journey south in the company of Jake Simms, shiftless sticker-upper carroming chaotically through life though fundamentally a good kid at heart, and his barely-legal belle Mindy, who is heavy with child.

As I said, very ordinary people, the salt of America's earth, and yet Tyler spins compelling tales out of this mundane material. There are no whizz-bang effects here, no shattering denouements, just quiet decisions and a return to the hard everyday business of living. For some reason, Charlotte's journey south put me in mind of another famous fictional roadtrip taken 15 years earlier - Harry Angstrom trying to flee from his wife Janice and his hometown of Brewer, PA - except that neither he nor Charlotte Emory manage to get very far in the end, neither are able to escape the fixed orbit of their lives. Ultimately, that great big bastard Life will claim the both of them, as it does all the rest of us, for that matter... Looking forward now to catching up

with the rest of Anne Tyler's oeuvre.

Mind the Book says

Hade P l a n e r för denna söndag, men omprioriterade och släpade upp kudde och filt till Sheen Common för fyra timmar i solen med en Anne Tyler från -77. Roadtrip och vardagsvisdom i form av longitudinellt ifrågasättande av tvåsamhetsnormen. Underbar!

Sharyl says

The most important action takes place in Charlotte's head. As this short novel opens, Charlotte is standing in line at the bank, ready to withdraw funds so that she can leave her husband, her house, her entire way of life. However, once again, she's thwarted.

Once again. The chapters begin to alternate between flashbacks of Charlotte's past life and what is happening in the present. In the present, she has been dragged away, at gun point, as the hostage of a bank robber named Jake Simms.

During the flashback chapters, the reader gets the story of how a young woman tried to go off to college, but family events called her back. Then one thing led to another, like fences closing in on her, and Charlotte winds up corralled into the very spot she did not want to be in.

Meanwhile, on the run with Jake Simms, Charlotte is, once again, not in control of events. Eventually, it becomes apparent that Jake isn't, either. The Jake chapters are an amusing comedy of errors. Jake is a man with a temper and impulse control problems. He's not the sharpest tool, either.

Wherever you go, there you are: Jake and Charlotte stay in character and play out their roles for awhile, but not forever. As in every Anne Tyler book, the main character finds a way to grow, to see things differently, and take back her life on her own terms.

This is superbly written and thought provoking in a number of ways. As Charlotte's life story starts in the 1950's and progresses into the '70's, I assumed that her limitations had to do mostly with being female, but in this novel, Tyler makes it clear that the male characters have their self-imposed limitations, too.

Excellent read, I'd recommend this to anyone!

Tonya says

I've said it before and I'll say it again. Anne Tyler is a constant. Good solid writing with a lovely story albeit sometimes tragic in theme. earthly possessions is no different. A bank robber and his hostage learn they're

not so different when they're caught in a car for weeks running from the law. I loved the robustness of the characters and the many comical moments. Read it if you need a book that doesn't make you work too hard.

Fabian says

Anne Tyler makes tiny lives sparkle. In fact, she's way more about character development than plot, and the actual content comes from a resistance in the protagonist to change. We've seen this previously in her later novels, "The Accidental Tourist" & "Breathing Lessons." That she avoids exaggeration in her prose & opts for a clean, crisp telling is a real valediction of her earthly prowess.

Sherrill Watson says

Tennessee Williams meets Billy Bob. I generally like Ms. Tyler; at least she's mildly entertaining. But this portrait of Middle America, where a housewife married to a preacher gets kidnapped by a dumb male, who is about to embark on a book-long quest to find his teenage pregnant girlfriend, left me speechless. Why didn't Charlotte just get out of the car early on? Why didn't Mindy stay where she was and BECOME someone, maybe in a board room? POOR, POOR CHOICES! So Charlotte had a terrible childhood, let others push her around and did for them instead of for herself her whole life, and then she wants to run away. Gosh, why would she want to do that? WHY DIDN'T SHE GROW UP? And Mindy was just the same! Charlotte ended up back with her husband, and Jake ends up with Mindy in Florida or North Carolina or somewhere. The whole book was about how they were all SO happily trapped by their circumstances and poor education. Ugh ugh ugh. I guess as an exploratory writing, it was OK, but not for me.

Julia says

Anne Tyler is genius. There is so much here. None of it easy, but a lot here. The book twists on the stories we tell ourselves and the stories others tell about us. On marriages and growing up and the importance of objects and their folly too. Brilliant.
