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An unsettling novel that traces the faltering orbits of the members of one family from a hidden love triangle to the ten-year-old son whose problem may pull everyone down.

Falling in Place Details

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Esther says

So I was reading the NYT book section and there was a review of Ann Beattie's new book and the reviewer said why isn't she more famous, very underrated american writer etc. Having never heard of her before reading this, my interest was piqued along with the description of her earlier novels being contemporary stories about everyday troubles, which appeals to me. So I picked this up second hand on Amazon for a couple of bucks and thought I'd give her a whirl.

Well she's not more reknown because simply she's not a very good writer. I struggled through this, none of her characters came to life. The references to contemporary culture, instead of illuminating the time (1980) were annoying - everytime someone turned on a radio it seems they were playing Blondie's Heart of Glass. Reading that for the fourth time had me wanting to throw the book out the train window.

Amy says

Bit of an Ice Storm/1970s death of the American Dream vibe. At the core of this book is an unhappy family - a cheating husband, an unsatisfied wife, a bored teenager, and a chubby insecure 10 year-old.

Sab says

Infidelity in the suburbs in the first blushes of the yuppie 80s. A disenchanted Connecticut suburban dad finds kinship with his daughter's free-spirited summer school teacher and her world of laid-back youthful free love.

Beattie's writing is sharp, evocative, and completist; every time I reread this book I'm transported to that hot 80's summer where every time you turn on the radio it's Blondie's "Heart of Glass," and everything seems better than the life you've got.

Susan Emmet says

Absolutely loved this novel. Was drawn mainly to the characters of John, father/husband on the run, in love with Nina - and to Cynthia, the summer school teacher, and to Mary, the daughter who's shot by her brother (who's under the spell of a most horrific "friend," Parker).

Each chapter cycles between and among the characters, turning each of their "quests" upside down and sometimes sideways.

Much about 80s music; that was cool.

And much about inadequacy, the search for love and meaning in a world full of uncertainty, irony (often unrecognized), and emptiness.

But something resonates in me from reading Beattie's novel. Will continue to figure out what.

Oscar Maquito says

*2.9/5

Jane Lump says

Although challenging to read, the complex, flawed characters make this worth the effort. In the end, it's hard to know who you are rooting for and why. But maybe that is how ambiguous life really is.

Carol Storm says

This is Ann Beattie's second novel, and it's not nearly as good as her legendary debut, CHILLY SCENES OF WINTER.

There are some writers who write really well about children, and some who write well about teenagers, and some who write well about family life. Ann Beattie is not one of those people. So much of this novel is devoted to characters she clearly does not like and can not understand -- a fat little boy who reads comic books, for example. It's fair to say Ms. Beattie was never a fat little boy, and judging from this book I'd say she never picked up a comic book in her life. There are a pair of teenage girls who are equally unrealized and deeply unattractive in a way that suggests a real aversion to teenagers in general.

All things considered, I'd give this one about two stars.

Jim Manis says

Dysfunctional New Yorkers, c. 1979

I've read quite a few of Beattie's short stories over the years. This is the first of her novels that I've read. She brings the same stylistic expertise and themes to this longer work as she has in her short stories. The best part of the novel, however, is the part about a ten-year-old boy shooting his fifteen-year-old sister. This action does not resolve any problems.

Marie B. Armstrong says

What just happened?

I read this book through to the end because I hoped all these plot threads would be resolved. But just because everyone is (unbelievably) connected to everyone else doesn't mean that there are any resolutions. The circularity is cute, but unsatisfying.

Dave Moyer says

Read this for a college class. Admittedly, she is a bit much for me.

Paul says

Ah, fantastic. Here, finally, is a book that jumps between a number of characters, chapter by chapter, and still gives each his due. Some of these characters will stick with me for a long time, notably the creepy friend, whose name I'm ironically forgetting. Parker. I wasn't forgetting, I was *ironically* forgetting. When the climax, as it were, happens, a few characters drop out a bit oddly, but I think it was a conscious choice Beattie made, because everything else was so well crafted and great. The magician was the only character who seemed a bit flat throughout, but even *he* was fleshed out at/by the end. So many strange things happen in this novel--or if not strange, just quotidian, and so particularized that the realism was heightened to ridiculous heights. It's the same particularization of a Lorrie Moore story, without the quirky wink wink effect. There were absolutely no tricks here. I think this has to be one of the most straightforward novels I've ever read. Yes, the Updike and Cheever comparisons on the front cover are, I'd say, justified. Just straightforward, no nonsense, memorable characters, a sad, fascinating, and extremely enjoyable read. Just great. Juuuust great.

Dorothy Howard says

This book is sad, wry, and does a good job describing the moral ambiguities in the traditional American family. It describes the falling out of a family, that was barely held together only out of mutual feelings of guilt and obligation. Each member is equally guilty of indifference and neglect, but also very lovable.

The narration style reminded me of Faulkner's 'The Sound and the Fury' a bit. Except that towards the end of the book, a main narrator does usurp the voice of the novel.

Allie says

Full disclosure: I didn't finish this book. I was about 3/4 of the way through when I found myself at a coffee shop with one of those "take a book, leave a book" shelves and decided that I really didn't care what happened to the wannabe-Tom Wolfe characters. What had started as mindless subway reading had turned into an unbelievable soap opera with the incomprehensible twist involving an attempted murder. And with such a limited cast of characters, was it really necessary to name three of them John, Jonathan, and John Joel? I spent at least 20 pages thinking two of those were the same person. Oh, and did you know this was the 80s? Or do the pop culture references on every single page escape your notice? Don't worry, there will be more on the next page. I believe the blurb on the back of the book said this was "The Catcher in the Rye" of the 80s, but I'm pretty sure Holden Caulfield would dismiss everyone in it as phonies.

Lacewing says

This is a fun, ironically twisted story about family and other relationships, a modern fractured fairy-tale set in suburbia.

If a director could bring out just that quality, I'd love to see a movie starring the anti-king, anti-princess, anti-wizard and so on. Near the end, maybe everyone would wear the fool's hat, at each other's service.

Nikko says

The book was interesting enough to at least get through, but I found the characters, setting, and plot (or lack thereof) to be pretty lame. Just boring people living boring lives, not really doing anything or going anywhere, with lots of references to 80's music and culture. I continued to read it because I thought that it would pick up, and really get interesting but it never did. Happy that I picked this up from a train station bargain bin for 50 cents. Money well spent. I guess.
