



A Few Short Notes on Tropical Butterflies: Stories

By John Murray

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These vivid and compelling tales, many set in Africa and Asia, are about immigrants and others facing change and dislocation. The science is never pedantic; indeed the language of biology and natural history is used to great lyrical effect. The stories are accomplished and seasoned, remarkably so given that this is the author's first book. Murray is adept at holding together a complex narrative and creating characters who reach out emotionally to the reader upon first meeting.

Global in scope, classical in form, evocative of place, and deeply emotional, this collection marks the beginning of what promises to be an illustrious career.

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A Few Short Notes on Tropical Butterflies: Stories By John Murray Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

John Murray trained as a doctor, and his debut collection of stories, *A Few Short Notes on Tropical Butterflies*, reveals its author's background. Not all of his characters are physicians, but they tend to share a doctor's ability to concentrate on details and compartmentalize emotions. In "The Hill Station," the American-born daughter of Indian parents returns to India, where she speaks at a conference on infectious diseases. She is charged with new, ungovernable feelings when she finally meets actual patients with the disease she specializes in; heretofore, she had only known cholera under a microscope. Murray bumps his heroine into a new, looser way of living as she travels deeper into dirty, disease-ridden India. In the title story, a doctor mourns the loss of his sister and comes to terms with his family history, all the while examining butterflies. In "Blue," a climber ascends a Himalayan peak under dire circumstances and encounters ghostly memories of his father. These stories of frustrated, intelligent achievers can recall Mark Helprin, and Murray has, too, some of Helprin's ambitious scope. These stories aren't as crystalline as Helprin's, but that's a small complaint to lodge against an elegant first collection. --*Claire Dederer*

From Publishers Weekly

The characters in this vibrant debut story collection—doctors, scientists and others drawn to precise order and logic—go to political and geographical extremes in search of a sense of purpose. A young American trauma surgeon in "Watson and the Shark" works for the Red Cross in a central African country. His craving for "life-or-death, all-or-nothing situations" is cruelly satisfied when he's shot by an armed rebel and his colleagues are forced to barter for their lives and abandon the people they went to the jungle to help. "The Hill Station" depicts a scientist in her immigrant parents' native Bombay seeking out the "real life" manifestation of the cholera bacteria she has spent her career studying in cool Atlanta laboratories. Overwhelmed by the horrors of the disease and the realization that an affair with a married colleague back home has left her pregnant, she flees the city and, on a bus headed to the tourist outpost of Mahabaleshwar, meets the man who will be a father to her unborn child. "The Carpenter Who Looked like a Boxer" is a beautifully restrained, vivid story about a gifted artisan trying to piece his life back together around the "great open wound" left by his wife's departure. Unlike many of Murray's characters, he doesn't try to run from his problems, but loses himself in his work and his two children instead. The only sign of strain is the strange, phantom burrowing sound that he hears in the walls of his house, a house he built for his wife. Murray's prose is strong and agile, rising to the drama of his scenarios without being overblown. His symbolism is occasionally too obvious, but this is a minor flaw; the affecting portraits make this collection emotionally resonant and enormously gratifying.

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From Library Journal

Murray reveals his training as a doctor in this debut collection, which must contain some amazing work to be getting such a big push from the publisher.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Michael Colburn:

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Kathy Vaughn:

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