



# My Mistress's Sparrow Is Dead: Great Love Stories, from Chekhov to Munro

By Jeffrey Eugenides

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"When it comes to love, there are a million theories to explain it. But when it comes to love stories, things are simpler. A love story can never be about full possession. Love stories depend on disappointment, on unequal births and feuding families, on matrimonial boredom and at least one cold heart. Love stories, nearly without exception, give love a bad name . . . .

It is perhaps only in reading a love story (or in writing one) that we can simultaneously partake of the ecstasy and agony of being in love without paying a crippling emotional price. I offer this book, then, as a cure for lovesickness and an antidote to adultery. Read these love stories in the safety of your single bed. Let everybody else suffer."—Jeffrey Eugenides, from the introduction to *My Mistress's Sparrow Is Dead*

All proceeds from *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead* will go directly to fund the free youth writing programs offered by 826 Chicago. 826 Chicago is part of the network of seven writing centers across the United States affiliated with 826 National, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students ages 6 to 18 with their creative and expository writing skills, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write.

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## **My Mistress's Sparrow Is Dead: Great Love Stories, from Chekhov to Munro** By Jeffrey Eugenides **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

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#### Book Description

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### A Q&A with Jeffrey Eugenides



The author of bestsellers *The Virgin Suicides* and *Middlesex*, Jeffrey Eugenides talks about his turn as editor of *My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead*, with Andrea Hoag, a book critic in Lawrence, Kansas, whose reviews have appeared in the Los Angeles Times Book Review, *Film Comment*, and *Kirkus Reviews*.

**Q:** What was the process of elimination like? Can you discuss which stories you decided to leave out?

**A:** The story I miss most is "Brokeback Mountain" by Annie Proulx. I picked it, but we weren't able to secure the rights to reprint it, even though the anthology supports a charitable cause. The UK edition lacks James Joyce's "The Dead" for similar reasons. (Happily, "The Dead" is in public domain in the U.S.) The first thing you confront when you compile an anthology like this, however, is the painful obligation to exclude wonderful work. Lots and lots of it. The only way I could sleep at night was to remind myself it was all for a good cause. How did I choose? The way people choose their mates: for intelligence, beauty, humor, and a sense that they'll be around for the long haul.

**Q:** You say in your introduction that "sober middle-age had made me less susceptible to [Nabokov's] lush lyricism." In a way, editing this collection brought you back into the proverbial fold where he was concerned. Why do you feel that he is "much better...than everybody else...?"

**A:** In all honesty, I was never out of the fold. Nabokov has always been and remains one of my favorite writers. He's able to juggle ten balls where most people can juggle three or four. "Spring in Fialta" works on so many levels: as an affecting tale of thwarted love; a reenactment of the literary process by which we fall victim to, and memorialize, our loves; and a philosophical rumination on time and fate. The sentences are perfect, the emotion deep, the intellectual scintillation nearly blinding. Pure bliss, in other words.

**Q:** I've been building up an imaginary shrine in my home dedicated to the cult of Lorrie Moore and I almost wept when I read the line from "How to Be An Other Woman" that goes... "he laughs, smooth, beautiful, and tenor, making you feel warm inside of your bones. And it hits you; maybe it all boils down to this: people will do anything, anything, for a really nice laugh...." I truly believe that. Don't you think most people--smart, thinking people--would do just about anything for someone with a nice laugh?

**A:** I'm glad you like the Lorrie Moore Story. Lorrie herself doesn't. She wrote it when she was twenty-four, and neither my own appreciation of the story, nor my assurances that many people insisted I include it, were enough to dissuade her from detesting her own "immature" work. This is a sign of a great writer, by the way. But "How to be An Other Woman" remains a great story. In addition, since a lot of the stories in the anthology share a traditional narrative structure, the Moore story comes as a nice shift in tone and strategy. I was conscious of that, too, in putting the book together, the DJ aspect of the whole thing, moving from fast numbers to slow dances and back again.

**Q:** Can you talk a little bit about the charity the proceeds for this book will go to?

**A:** 826CHI is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting students ages 6 to 18 with their creative and expository writing skills, and to helping teachers inspire their students to write. Their services are structured around the understanding that great leaps in learning can happen with one-on-one attention, and that strong writing skills are fundamental to future success. 826CHI provides after-school tutoring, class field trips to our location, writing workshops, and in-schools programs--all free of charge--for students, classes, and schools in Chicago. All of the programs are challenging and enjoyable, and ultimately strengthen each student's power to express ideas effectively, creatively, confidently, and in his or her individual voice. Driving the mission home are more than 500 volunteers--the professional writers, teachers and artists, to name a few, who staff each and every program enables 826 CHI to serve 5,000 students annually with a small, efficient staff of four and an operating budget of about \$282,550.

## Review

'[A] brilliant collection of love stories!An absolute must--read.' Harper's Bazaar, Editor's picks of the month 'Better than a bunch of flowers, if not so sweet.' Metro 'Eugenides has written a marvellous little essay on the love story to introduce his choices! an outstanding collection' Joanna Trollope, The Times '[Eugenides's] artful arrangement of the stories adds to their pleasure. The collection is full of intriguing echoes that complement...one's responses' Sunday Telegraph 'There are plenty of stories here which any lover of good writing -- if not perhaps every lover -- will enjoy.' The Scotsman 'Probably the most scintillating company anyone could hope to take to bed with them on February 14' Image 'Better than a bunch of flowers, if not so sweet.' The Metro 'Fiction of the Week' 'A wonderful anthology of short stories.' Red "'Classy" and "love-themed" are not phrases often found together, but this collection of stories, edited by a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, is just that.' LondonPaper 'The mix chosen by Eugenides is wonderful!The plots are wildly different; the range in tone, form and style is immense. This brings unexpected delights! And it is a bigger thrill to

realize that however painful the heartbreak, love offers real rewards -- and these stories are among them.' LA Times 'A must-read for lovers of great writing -- and of love.' Yorkshire Post 'Love, they say, makes the world go round. So it makes sense that each of the marvellous love stories in "My Mistress's Sparrow is Dead" succeeds in creating a world of its own - and then sets it spinning on its axis! this collection makes us remember how powerful and essential the best short stories are, and how -- very much like love -- they can make us feel as if some mischievous god has shot an arrow that has ever so sweetly and painfully pierced its target: the human heart.' Francine Prose, O Magazine 'Eugenides offers a perfect Valentine's Day gift for lovers of literary fiction. His witty introduction, which channels Roman love poet Catullus and woolgathers engagingly about the "perishable nature of love", is only the first among numerous pleasures that await the reader of this generously proportioned -- only a cad would call it "fat" -- gathering of 26 stories, written within the past 120 years.! One of the best anthologies of recent years, as well as commanding proof that its editor is as expert a reader and critic as he is a novelist.' Kirkus Praise for 'Middlesex': 'Expansive and radiantly generous!a colossal act of curiosity, of imagination and of love.' New York Times 'This year's most sumptuously enjoyable book!superb.' Sunday Times, Books of the Year 'The best American novel since "The Corrections"!exuberant, ambitious, deeply compassionate and wildly funny.' GQ 'This is a truly original and compelling novel, by turns sad, funny and moving.' Daily Mail Praise for 'The Virgin Suicides': 'Beautiful funny and touching!Eugenides is a skilful craftsman and a hypnotic storyteller.' Jay McInerney 'One of the finest novels in many years -- a "Catcher in the Rye" for our time.' Observer "'The Virgin Suicides" is wonderfully original. It could prove to be the start of an important writing career.' Independent

#### About the Author

Jeffrey Eugenides was born in Detroit and attended Brown and Stanford Universities. His first novel, *The Virgin Suicides*, was published to great acclaim in 1993 and was made into a film directed by Sofia Coppola. His second novel, *Middlesex*, won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award.

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#### Carissa Taylor:

People live in this new morning of lifestyle always attempt to and must have the time or they will get large amount of stress from both everyday life and work. So , when we ask do people have extra time, we will say absolutely indeed. People is human not just a robot. Then we question again, what kind of activity have you got when the spare time coming to anyone of course your answer will unlimited right. Then do you try this one, reading ebooks. It can be your alternative in spending your spare time, the actual book you have read is

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