

Wonderful Town: New York Stories from The New Yorker (Modern Library Paperbacks)

David Remnick

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New York City is not only The New Yorker magazine's place of origin and its sensibility's lifeblood, it is the heart of American literary culture. Wonderful Town, an anthology of superb short fiction by many of the magazine's most accomplished contributors, celebrates the seventy-five-year marriage between a preeminent publication and its preeminent context with this collection of forty-four of its best stories from (so to speak) home.

East Side? Philip Roth's chronically tormented alter ego Nathan Zuckerman has just moved there, in "Smart Money." West Side? Isaac Bashevis Singer's narrator mingles with the customers in "The Cafeteria" (who debate politics and culture in four or five different languages) and becomes embroiled in an obsessional romance. And downtown, John Updike's Maples have begun their courtship of marital disaster, in "Snowing in Greenwich Village." John Cheever, John O'Hara, Lorrie Moore, Irwin Shaw, Woody Allen, Laurie Colwin, Saul Bellow, J. D. Salinger, Jean Stafford, Vladimir Nabokov--they and many other stellar literary guides to the city will be found in these pages.

Wonderful Town touches on some of the city's famous places and stops at some of its more obscure corners, but the real guidebook in and between its lines is to the hearts and the minds of those who populate the metropolis built by its pages. Like all good fiction, these stories take particular places, particular people, and particular events and turn them into dramas of universal enlightenment and emotional impact. The five boroughs are the five continents. New York is every great and ordinary place. Each life in it, and each life in Wonderful Town, is the life of us all.

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