



# The Angel on the Roof

*Russell Banks*

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## **The Angel on the Roof** Russell Banks

With *The Angel on the Roof*, Russell Banks offers readers an astonishing collection of thirty years of his short fiction, revised especially for this volume and highlighted by the inclusion of nine new stories that are among the finest he has ever written. As is characteristic of all of Bank's works, these stories resonate with irony and compassion, honesty and insight, extending into the vast territory of the heart and the world, from working-class New England to Florida and the Caribbean and Africa. Broad in scope and rich in imagination, *The Angel on the Roof* affirms Russell Banks's place as one of the masters of American storytelling.

## **The Angel on the Roof Details**

Date : Published April 24th 2001 by Harper Perennial (first published January 4th 1999)

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Author : Russell Banks

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# From Reader Review The Angel on the Roof for online ebook

## Marie Zhuikov says

This is an unsettling, disturbing, thought-provoking collection of short stories. Many of the stories take place in a trailer park community in New England. Different stories jump around in time, which sometimes explains characters' actions in previous stories, but sometimes is just plain confusing.

My favorite stories were "The Moor," which deals with a past love, "Indisposed," in which a wife finds her power, and the story about the old man who wins the lottery, which functions as a parable about the power (or lack of power) of money.

The series begins with the fanciful image of the eavesdropping angel on the roof, to whom all our stories are offered, and it ends with a literal "bang." Yowza.

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## Krenner1 says

I have enjoyed Russell Banks' novels but they have left me just short of high praise. Good writing but just lacking, for me, a story stamina. So was I ever thrilled to pick up his book of short stories. In my opinion THIS is his genre, where he captures a snippet of a life or thought and intensifies it without the frustration of building a story for commercial reading/success. These are wonderful.

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## Shane says

I picked up this collection never intending to finish it – nearly 500 pages, of short stories! But I did, trapped as I was in the middle of the ice storm, and was glad for the experience.

I was reminded of Raymond Carver and John Steinbeck when reading these stories, many of which are located in a town called Catamount, New Hampshire. The characters are mostly blue collar workers, often plumbers, leading hard scrabble lives, hanging at the edges of penury. They are scarred individuals, prone to alcohol, adultery, violence, racism, sexism, greed, and vanishing jobs, but with a strong homing call toward their roots in this small state that seems to be fond of Canadian Club whiskey. Children of broken marriages feature prominently and I wondered whether the 12-year old boy in the '50's with a younger brother and sister, whose father abandons the family, a scenario occurring in more than one story ("Queen for a Day" and "The Visit"), is a reflection on the author's life. However, adult children of broken families should never question their aging parents about what happened those many years ago to disrupt the family unit, as we discover in "Assisted Living." Plain but strong women are entwined with younger and attractive men, leading to disastrous results ("Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story"). Some of the shorter stories are told in parable form such as "The Fish," and "The Neighbour." Communist leanings come out in "With Che in New Hampshire" and in the dramatic recreation of Simon Bolivar's last hours in "The Rise of the Middle Class." An unexpected event can lead a man to question the new direction he is taking with his life after the collapse of a long term marriage ("Xmas"). And the final story "Lobster Night" is a dramatic exploration into what happens when individual breaking points are breached, for both men and women. The most moving story for me was "The Moor," where a 50-something local thespian (also in the plumbing business for his day job, and

divorced) meets his 80- year old former lover from 30 years ago, in a restaurant, and escorts her home.

Banks is a slow burn on the longer stories where he takes time and lengthy sentences (some of which are clumsy and pretentious) to build character, but you have to stay the course to gain the benefit. Two of the stories, “The Fisherman” and “The Guinea Pig Lady” run 120 pages between them, and take place in the same trailer park (there are other stories too from this trailer park, pulled from his 1981 collection, aptly named Trailerpark) and are similar in construct; they portray the outsider who goes against the norms of society for altruistic reasons; there is even a section in both stories where the individual judgements of the trailer park denizens (aka society) on these outcasts who dare to go against the grain are laid out candidly and embarrassingly, for we too could be one of those people casting those judgements. The opening story, Djinn, set in a fictitious African state, is similar in theme, where those who rise to the top and look beyond are pulled down by the dictates of a conformist society.

The unfortunate aspect of throwing a writer’s entire body of short fiction into a one mammoth collection is that there will be unevenness between stories, and there is in this one too given the 37 year span over which they were written. Styles vary from 1st person to 2nd person to 3rd person. In fact, the 2nd person constructs are very effectively rendered.

All that said, if you have the time and patience to let Banks conjure up his scenes and characters in his deliberate and methodical fashion, this is a very enjoyable and memorable read.

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## **Federico says**

Il perché di questo libro: perché dal mio punto di vista Russell Banks è un autore da leggere. Perché sono incappato in Russell Banks poco meno di venti anni fa, ed è diventato presto uno degli scrittori di cui leggere tutto, anche la lista della spesa.

Banks, a pensarci bene, si inserisce in quella fascia di età in cui tutto (la musica ascoltata, i libri letti, le esperienze vissute) è stato così intenso da diventare parte di me, interiorizzata.

L'angelo sul tetto è una raccolta di racconti brevi (il più lungo è di una cinquantina di pagine; gli altri, mediamente, di una quindicina), che raccontano un'America fuori dalle mappe turistiche, rimasta ai margini del Sogno Americano, sconfitta dagli eventi.

Storie di fallimenti, raccontate da un narratore onnisciente che non giudica mai le debolezze dei personaggi, ma li racconta con un delicato affetto che non diventa mai compassione.

Pur non essendo un amante della forma 'racconto' ho trovato questo libro denso, intriso di quel lirismo che solo la tensione delle storie vere (o verosimili) possiede.

Mi sono avvicinato a questo libro dubbioso, lo lascio a voi conquistato.

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## **Lylah says**

Russell Banks is not for everyone. His writing has been described as "harsh" and most people who prefer either light reading or fantasy hate his work (and in my experience Banks seems to provoke love or hate responses). You have to appreciate gritty realism, methodical character and plot development, and preferably have a familiarity with northern New England and upstate New York, to appreciate his stories. With that stated upfront, he is a very talented writer with a deep understanding of human nature, and his best work (including "Affliction" and "The Sweet Hereafter") leaves the reader with a deepened understanding of human nature. This is a collection of short fiction from close to four decades of writing, selected by the author to represent what he feels is his strongest work. "Sarah Cole: A Type of Love Story" in particular stands out as a little masterpiece of first-person short story writing.

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### **Shannon Leahy says**

Russell Banks is an exceptional writer! I got lost in these stories and characters. They gave me the same feeling I get from viewing Caspar David Freidrich paintings -- Complex themes and characters (the crux of who we are as human beings) in landscapes that make your jaw drop. Wow!

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### **Prima Seadiva says**

Audiobook. Reader was decent. I would give this 3.5 stars.

A number of stories were connected by place and characters. One disadvantage of listening was not being able to easily look back at some of those connections. I often wish audio books had better table of contents. Most of the stories were quite good. As they were written over a period of time some were better than others. The stories involve the lives of working class and lower middle class and how people so often get stuck by circumstance and decision was poignant. The depiction of those lives rang true.

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### **Mary Appold says**

A good read. Easy to pick up and read a story or two, then come back a few days later and read one or two more. I was a few stories in before I caught on they were all connected. Soon it seemed like reading a story took on the feel of a call "back home" catching up on the lives of people you'd left behind. A good book for lunch breaks, waiting in lines and doctor's offices, and to keep handy on the side table between loads of laundry.

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### **Mmars says**

I often have difficulty reading a collection of short stories from beginning to end, but "Angel on the Roof" held me from the whole way through. There were a couple less impressive stories (thankfully they were all short) but some of these will hold me for some time. The squallor of the Guinea Pig Lady, the moral of the Fisherman, the heart-wrenching decision in the Burden, etc. Many of these stories revolve around decisions and their consequences - most often through the elusive nature of male thought and the unexplainable actions men take. I felt the women were more weakly drawn characters, but was not bothered by this - probably

because so many of the stories' characters had so many faults or bad luck or repeated family cycles of poverty, abuse, alcoholism, etc. that I didn't desire to know all the characters well.

I may be wrong, but I think this would be a difficult book for some men to read because many of the characters are hurting and they just can't control or face it. Difficult, yes. But true? Sadly, too often.

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### **Joseph says**

Russell Banks continues to be an author who makes me regret not having found him earlier in my life. On the other hand, I wonder if I would have been able to truly appreciate him before now, or if his particular blend of melancholy and regret are only suited to the man I've become.

This is a great collection of short stories, and it was especially exciting to see his occasional jumps outside the comfort zone of rural New Hampshire. Still, my favorites from the collection are probably "The Fisherman" and "Plains of Abraham," both of which manage to merge Banks' genius at characterization with a compelling story. "The Moor" is also great, although it lacks much in the way of plot.

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### **Roni Askey-Doran says**

It's on the nightstand to read again.

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### **Ted Burke says**

If there was a sense of humor, or even hope in Russell Banks' life, it must have been beaten out of him a long time ago, if these tales are any indication. There is a perverse yearning glamor to be found in these stories about the hard, bitter truths the characters find, or don't, almost as if the hopelessness is something to be envied. Cheever, it can be said, is often times dour and melancholic, but at least lightens the load with transcendent prose, and a dark wit. In the art of using finely wrote sentences and skillfully rendered imagery to depict narratives where a sad ending is inevitable, Cheever is a master; the tragic, the forlorn, the ache and condition of the character's lives are made more emphatic by the elegant framing Cheever places around the particulars. The lesson, intended or not, is that art needn't be limited to helping us appreciate the pretty, peaceful and serene matters of life; only to make us feel the conditions of existence deeper. Additionally, Cheever knew when to quit; craft and art are ever present in his stories, Banks lacks even that, and this succession of dark skies, long winters, and teeth-grinding pain bearing just wears out: the writing, dare we say, even veers towards the cliché. A better written and more incisively written set of stories are needed in place of this.

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### **Doug Pfeffer says**

Terse, tough short stories set in rough New England small town settings.

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## **Simone Subliminalpop says**

Semplici scene di famiglie: uomini, donne, giovani e vecchi. Semplicemente la bravura di usare le parole giuste, non una di più, nel modo migliore per costruire un'atmosfera, una sensazione.

Tra i migliori racconti: Il pescatore – Le pianure di Abramo – Mucca-mucca – Il moro – Sarah Cole: un certo tipo di storia d'amore – Regina per un giorno.

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## **Larry Bassett says**

Russell Banks does not do much happy. But if you like winter and New Hampshire you may find much to like in the short stories of this book. There was a story early in the book about a boy learning to ice skate. It brought me to my youth in Michigan winters skating in a variety of places from small lakes to flooded rinks in the neighborhood.

Some of the characters live in trailers and drink too much and experience and sometimes initiate violence. It is said that the 30 some short stories in the book were selected by Banks himself who considered them the best of his work. I like reading short stories. But these days I am mostly listening to audible books rather than flipping paper pages. With this book the reader was competent but not extraordinary. Every story was read in about the same voice. I think and hope that I have another broken two by Banks I like him.

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