



Justice

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The author of the prize-winning national bestseller Montana 1948 returns with a stunning prequel of the memorable Hayden clan's early years.

Justice Details

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Jeanette says

Once again I'm the odd person out on this duo. I liked this one far more than Montana. The prequel of short stories is crisper. More insightful, just a better window into the Bentreck, Montana world of these periods during the earliest parts of the 20th century. The coming of age progression of Montana doesn't have the spectrum view that this one does.

You get to feel and view emotional positives and also the practical voids and terrible negative personality flaws in nearly all the characters that twine these stories. Because you view them at different ages, you also can conceptualize the vast change or core desire alterations as life contorts a boy to a man to a grandpa. Or a girl to a wife to a woman who holds little memory of the spirit of either.

It's good. Excellent writing which doesn't have to contain and place every single "lesson" or social injustice event or attitude displayed with verbose signage of a 500 word introduction as if you were a child reading morality plays and can't observe the situation yourself.

This author is also quite accurate toward the tremendous physicality demand of the location, and yet often holds a maudlin frame toward the observations and plotting lines. Morose or cold, with a kind of predetermined negativity for habit to follow habit. Most of them bad ones. He scales quite "down there" on homo sapiens' behavioral patterns quotient (humans have TONS of inherent obnoxiousness or selfishness by his evaluations it seems). While at the same time he projects, for me, a bunch more validity to "feelings" than he does to logic or intellect on the whole. Especially in his woman, which are done far less skillfully than his men are. That's why I'm surprised I enjoyed these as much as I did.

Susan says

Justice is the prequel to Watson's excellent novel Montana 1948 and provides backstories for the Hayden family and friends featured in the earlier work. I read Montana 1948 several years ago and it remains one of my favorite books. While Justice doesn't rise to the same heights, it is definitely a worthwhile read. The novel's structure, each chapter devoted to the topic of justice from the perspective of a different narrator, reads more like a collection of really good short stories. I would recommend reading Justice first and going on to Montana 1948. These two novellas would be a perfect reading combination for a rainy weekend. (Or if, like me you're in Northern New England in April, a snowy weekend.)

James Buscher says

I'm not sure what there is to like in this book. I didn't like any of the characters. They were all some combination of racist, sexist, violent, and weak. I felt bad for some of them, but didn't see an ounce of justice delivered to them for their clear failings. I liked Montana 1948, but this was a laborious and aimless read, populated by characters I'd rather not know.

Chris White says

Well-written from sentence to sentence but mostly pointless as a book or as a story, at least unless you read the previously released and award-winning sequel, *Montana 1948*.

Watson has chops, for sure, but this volume is just a collection of vignettes that serve only to flesh out that previously published award-winner's details. I closed the back cover of the book a little frustrated, saying, "Well, that sucks. Too artsy-phartsy for me."

I gave it two stars because at least these little episodes are well executed, but it's not a contiguous story with any kind of point or purpose at all. It's a collection of sketches, and should have been billed as such. "Justice" is just a word conjured up to try to glue all these separate bits together. If it was titled "Hayden snapshots," I would be less bummed to have spent a couple of days on it.

I just hate when books leave me feeling empty; it's such a dirty postmodern trick to play, one that's old and tired, unoriginal, and certainly not artistic after 100 years of people doing it and saying, "Gee, aren't I clever."

Anna says

So far I am enjoying this one. I did go directly to the library to find it when I finished '*Montana, 1948*' because I enjoyed that one so much. Larry Watson is really great at character development. This is a prelude to that one, so it is interesting to read further about the characters from this small Montana town.

Last night I finished this one. I'm surprised it took me so long, I read it when I had some free time. The book that this is a prelude to is '*Montana 1948*.' That one was an incredibly fast read and I enjoyed it immensely. This one was important to that one, in the way that it explained many of the characters and how they came to be in this small Montana town. You come to understand how some of the unfortunate events in that book could or could not be avoided. It was almost like some of the characters were just destined to have these things in their lives take place. Larry Watson is a very good writer and I would definitely consider reading his other works.

Lauren says

I was really looking forward to this as *Montana 1948* could be my favourite book of all time. I can't believe it took me all these years to realise that Larry Watson had written about the Hayden circle twice!

I went into it knowing that, given my love for the first, it was not likely to leave such a mark on me. Unfortunately it has not left much of a mark at all. I think his character portraits in *Montana 1948* are so precise, so beautifully rendered, that this book was just superfluous.

In short, this book is just not necessary because *Montana 1948* is so perfect. It does not contribute anything of real meaning, and I do not feel I learned anything new or important about the characters. I didn't need to know about Julian and Enid's courtship to understand them in the first book, or have Gail as narrator to

comprehend her complexities as relayed by David in M1948.

Larry Watson has written a good book, but an unnecessary one. We saw the Haydens perfectly through David's eyes; so this collection of short character essays is largely forgettable.

Ron says

This is a series of seven interconnected short stories that's also a prequel to the author's novel "Montana 1948." Set in the far northeastern corner of Montana, across the state line from North Dakota and just south of the Canadian border, these stories cover four brief decades from the area's first settling in the late nineteenth century to the mid-1930s. Appearing in all of them are members of the Hayden family, chiefly father Julian and son Wesley, who are each employed as the county's sheriff. Both are intelligent, somewhat difficult men, as we see them through the eyes of other characters.

Watson writes with a gentle hand, often with greater sympathy for the women he writes about, while admiring the take-charge qualities in the men who share their lives - qualities that can easily tilt into character flaws. That delicate balance is reflected in a scene at a Thanksgiving dinner in which Wesley's father and older brother behave too familiarly with a young female guest. It appears again as Wesley's wife sees her husband rough up an Indian who won't leave a bar, while being unwilling or unable to hold his newborn son. This ambiguity makes Watson's stories fascinating, touching on character traits central to the mythology of the American West, and the contradictions at the heart of "civilizing" the land and the people - indigenous or otherwise - who have made it their home. Well written and well observed, with thoughtful insight into memorable characters.

Teresa says

These short stories provide a backdrop for most of the main characters in Montana 1948, proving the writerly advice that an author must know the backstories of his characters even though the reader may never discover them. At least in this case, it proved an interesting exercise for this reader to be able to do so.

Justice in these tales is held in the hands of one family, specifically in the hands of one man, the patriarch of the Hayden family. Though his office is in the courthouse and his son is a lawyer, the courtroom is never seen. Justice is meted out by the sheriff—swiftly; sometimes generously though showily; and usually arbitrarily, due to privilege.

I was surprised (and by the collection's end, felt a bit deflated) that we did not get the point-of-view of one main character from Montana 1948. He's away at college for some of the time these stories cover, and we do see that some of his proclivities started in high school, but we don't see his path toward becoming a doctor and then the ugliness that arises from his own privilege: perhaps that's a blessing, as the first two stories were intense enough.

I'm not sure how I would've felt about these stories if I hadn't read Montana 1948 first, but I'm guessing the prior experience greatly informed this one.

Rob Turck says

Slow

Howard says

Do you know how many books have the word justice in their titles? I'll tell you: a bunch.

Okay, I'll narrow that a bit. I did a search on Goodreads and it generated 100 pages with 20 entries to each page. Do you know how many that is? I'll tell you: a bunch.

Even so, I venture to say that Larry Watson's book, *Justice*, is nevertheless unique among that bunch. It is a prequel to his best known novel, *Montana 1948*. But what makes it unique is that it is not a novel. It is a selection of short stories with each told from the point of view of one of the main characters in *Montana 1948* – with two exceptions.

One exception is the narrator of the earlier novel who is looking back to the summer of 1948 and so we already know his back story (assuming one has read the novel first). The other exception is the most enigmatic character in the novel. Oh, he appears in nearly all the short stories in *Justice*, but none is told from his point of view.

I found that odd – but intriguing. So I went looking for an explanation; and I found one. In an interview Watson said that he could never find his way into the character's mind and that was the reason for the omission.

You often hear writers say that characters sometimes take on a life of their own and thus the writer is forced to follow along. But here is a complex character who not only remains an enigma to the reader, but also to his creator.

I recommend both of these books, for Watson is a talented writer. However, even though each can be enjoyed as a standalone, I think that reading both adds to the enjoyment of reading each.

Sheri says

So, I am not a huge fan of short stories. I enjoy getting into a book, rather than having little vignettes. But I really like Watson and I really liked *Montana 1948*.

This book is not a collection of short stories; it is a family history of sorts. These are all stand alone stories (sort of), but they are also interesting and compelling back story to *Montana*. This is like sitting around at a family reunion and having the old folks tell you about their earlier years. All of these stories could have been part of *Montana* (as flashbacks), but they would have seemed overkill. Instead, this separate collection is just a companion book. And so, I wasn't at all upset about the short-story-ness of it.

The best one is the first, *Outside the Jurisdiction*. This is a good stand-alone, but it also sets the stage for *Montana* by showing the differences between the brothers as well as their father's influence and power. It

was well done and compelling.

Julian Hayden gives the history of Julian's arrival to Bentrock. It sets him up as quite a bad ass (but not a like-able guy). I was especially struck by the ending: "one he'd attacked, it just seemed to make more sense to cut first. After carrying the razor all that distance, Julian felt he had to use it" felt so much like Chekov's "a gun shown in Act 1..."

Enid Garling further illuminates Julian's character. I don't remember Enid at all from Montana (I think she was dead before it started, but maybe I'm just mis-remembering because she is so timid). In Montana, the boys are all grown up and their mother is less important; but this chapter really demonstrates Julian's dominance.

Thanksgiving sets up, once again, Wesley's difference from Frank and Julian. The scene at the dinner table where both men are oogling Wesley's girlfriend was just plain great; I could almost feel the tension rising off the page of the book.

Len McAuley was the sole story that does not feature a family. This is arguably a "short story" in the sense that it was not part of the family collection. However, it does further illustrate the differences between Wesley and Julian.

The Sheriff's Wife and The Visit were both from Gail's perspective; first just before she gets pregnant with David and second just after his birth. The interesting contrast here between Gail's view and the rest of the stories is that she sees only the similarities between Julian and Wesley. I found this to be especially ironic given the point and outcome of Montana 1948 and that I thought Gail was especially observant.

Overall they are enjoyable stories. I might not have liked them as much if I had not read Montana; it definitely feels like a companion piece rather than a stand alone collection.

Mmars says

Having just finished Watson's Montana 1948 and wanting more, more, more of that book and its characters, I jumped right into Justice. Therefore, it is impossible for me to opine on this as a stand alone book of stories. I do recommend reading the opening tale in which the brothers, Frank and Wesley, and two friends as teens go on a hunting trip. Because of a blizzard they take motel room, and I'll just say, misbehave. They end up in a jail outside their sheriff's fathers jurisdiction. The ending of the tale is indicative of their privileged position and their father's wealthy and powerful status. I felt this story on par with Montana 1948.

Several tales focus on Frank and Wesley's wives, how they came to be married, both knowing very little of their husbands. Little background is given to the marriages in Montana 1948, so I enjoyed these tales, but do not know if readers unfamiliar with 1948 would have appreciated them as much.

Reflecting upon what I have now read of Watson, there is one skill in his writing that deserves special mention. When one character reflects upon another's behavior, their minds run wild with unanswered questions. I will call this being able to write the turning of the mind. It helps build suspense, it compels the reader to keep reading. Watson definitely does not tell too much, and yet he does in that it seems there is

often no shame, just justification for disturbing actions under the law circa the isolated west circa 1920s-1940s.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 4* of five

The Publisher Says: Larry Watson's bestselling novel *Montana 1948* was acclaimed as "a work of art" (Susan Petro, *San Francisco Chronicle*), a prize-winning evocation of a time, a place, and a family. Now Watson returns to *Montana 1948*'s vast landscape with a stunning prequel that illuminates the Hayden clan's early years and the circumstances that led to the events of *Montana 1948*.

In *Montana*, the Hayden name is law. For the Hayden boys, Wesley and Frank, their legacy carries an aura of privilege and power that doesn't stop at the Montana border, even when an ill-fated hunting trip makes them temporary outlaws. But what it means to bear the name is something each generation must discover for itself. From Julian, the hard-bitten and blustery patriarch, to Gail, Sheriff Wesley Hayden's spirited wife and moral compass, Larry Watson gives breath and blood to a remarkable family's struggles and rewards, and opens an evocative window on the very heart of the American West.

My Review: A collection of previously published short pieces, *Justice* tells the backstory of the Haydens of Bentrock, Montana, the family at the center of Watson's one bestselling novel *Montana 1948*. We meet patriarch Julian Hayden in 1899, barely dry behind the ears and ready to take on the world; his shy, retiring, high-strung wife Enid on the day she married him; his two sons on the day childhood ended for both, in which the seeds of *Montana 1948* are explicitly sown; Wesley's short, abortive run for freedom from the weight of expectations sparks at a terrible family Thanksgiving dinner; Julian's and Wesley's deputy and general sad-sack, Len McAuley, comes in from the pointlessness of secondary characterization in unexpected and poignant ways; and then the marriage and parenthood of North Dakotan steel magnolia Gail and Wesley, a life started in, and blighted by, the shadows of the Hayden family legacy.

This is decidedly not *Montana 1948*. It's perfectly good read on its own, actually, just as character sketches of a family and its effects on the world at large, and its costs to the members thereof. I can't complain about anything here, because Dr. Watson is a prose stylist whose direct, pared down artistry is very appealing to me. I can't urge all and sundry to rush out and buy a copy, either, because the book is a collection of short stories with all the cultural freight implicit in that description. Tastes and hints and pieces are the stuff of short stories, and that is both a strength and a weakness. Here, it's perfect, because the novel they prequelize (a rather lumpish and ungainly neologism, but "prefigure" is so stuffily snooty) is in itself a marvel of tight, concise storytelling that leaves acres of room to wonder about the people in it. But on its own, under its own steam, it's very good but not great. Good writing, interesting characters, but nothing...well, nothing to launch it to that next level, say like *American Salvage* or *Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned*.

Still. You have definitely done worse by yourself than reading these seven stories. I'm glad I finally made room for them on the nightstand. Recommended.

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Jeanne says

I read "Montana 1948" first and I'm glad I did. The same characters appear in "Justice", which is a prequel and provides backstory. I would not have wanted to know this information while reading "Montana 1948", though. The Hayden family is a big name in Bantrook, MT. Julian Hayden is the sheriff and family patriarch. It is from him that all other characters flow. Whether we are meeting his wife, sons, deputy or daughter-in-law, everything points back to their relationship with Julian. The prose is spare and evocative of a wide-open landscape that is integral to the tale. Fascinating visit to another land and time.

Kevin says

Similar writing to Kent Haruf bit not quite as good. Anyone wanting to read this genre (good old fashioned stories in a western locale) should read Ivan Doig. He is fantastic. My favorite being the "whistling season"... Larry Watson book was just meh! Probably won't read any more of his
