



Hard to Be Good: Stories

Bill Barich

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In his first collection of short fiction, Bill Barich gives us cause to celebrate a prose stylist who can gracefully cross the boundaries of genre. As stated by Anne Tyler, *Hard to Be Good* is so large and complete that you tend to look up at the end and find yourself surprised that it's still the same day.

Set in the American West, as are three other of the seven stories in this book, it is about the unselfconscious struggle for wholeness in a divided family. Its adolescent protagonist moves from innocence to experience in the course of a summer vacation with his mother and her third husband, and the result is satisfying, rather than harrowing.

The attempt to make signification relationships cohere, to weather the transformation of innocence, informs all the stories in this book, and in Barich's worlds the outcome is often good—knowledge does not always lead to hopelessness. Highly disparate mothers covering on a couple in Idaho Falls (“Where the Mountains Are”) have much to teach and learn, a nineteen-year-old American studying in Florence accepts the surprising human complications of an outsider's great pensione adventure (“Caravaggio”) . . . and that's just a few of Barich's brilliant stories.

Hard to Be Good is a book of real feeling, breadth, and narrative movement. As Frederick Exley wrote, “Barich is a splendidly gifted writer.”

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