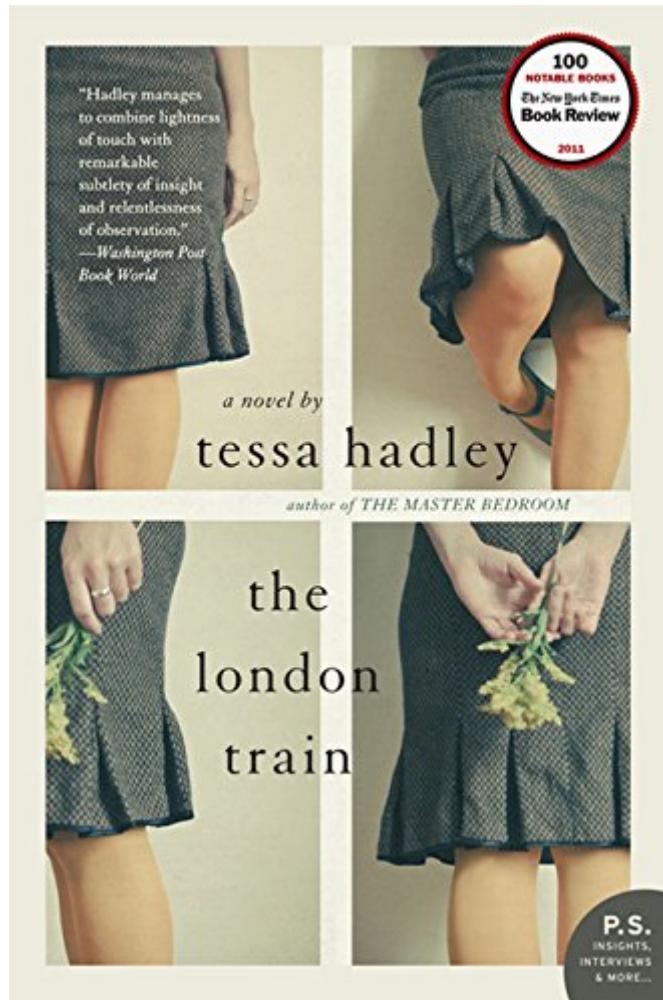


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The London Train



Synopsis

"Hadley is a lovely, subtly teasing writer." — "New York Times Book Review" Long-listed for the Orange Prize

Two lives, stretched between two cities, converge in a chance meeting with immediate and far-reaching consequences in this compelling, sophisticated tale from acclaimed New Yorker writer Tessa Hadley, author of *Accidents in the Home* and *The Master Bedroom*. As father struggles to reestablish a relationship with his estranged daughter in London, surrendering himself to an underground life of illegal squats and counterculture friendships, a wife decides she must flee her suffocating marriage to return to Wales, where in Cardiff she may rediscover the passions that once fueled her life. Embracing change and facing loss, in a story evocative of Alice Munro's *Runaway* and Julia Glass's *I See You Everywhere*, Hadley's powerful characters illuminate the furthest reaches of love, hope, and determination.

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Customer Reviews

Very disappointed unfortunately ... loads of points that go nowhere ... what should have been a really neat device ... London train stories ... just didn't follow through ... hate to say it but I really

don't know why this was such a hit ... even the characters are horrible

I ordered this book knowing nothing about it, simply that it was on the New York Times list of best fiction of 2011. I was encouraged by the interesting cover and distinguished typography. I read the first of the two novellas, "The London Train," with quiet satisfaction; it was a subtle story of a man's mid-life crisis, avoiding the obvious dramatic cliches, but full of sensitive observation and genuine feeling. The opening of the second novella, "Only Children" -- a young separated woman looking back at her wedding day -- gripped me emotionally in a way the first story never quite managed to do, and by the time I was a third of the way into it, I was reading with bated breath, unable to put the book down. The review I began in my mind soon after starting the second novella would have been entitled "Separation." Two locations in Great Britain, London and South Wales, connected by the train that forms an important but not overworked link in both stories. Two people at least temporarily separated from their spouses. Paul, living with his wife and young daughters on a farm in the Monnow Valley, already coping with the death of his mother, goes to London to look into the apparent disappearance of his daughter by his first marriage, and finds himself spending more and more time there. I was struck by Hadley's ability to write about mid-life crisis while focusing on interior lives only, essentially omitting the mechanics of adultery as an articulating device. I was even more struck by the beginning of the second novella. Cora, a woman of thirty-five when the story opens, has traveled in the opposite direction, leaving her rather older husband in London to move into her parents' former house in Cardiff. The major characters in both halves, not just the protagonists but also their spouses and friends, are all reasonable people, respectful of each other, competently leading their lives despite nurturing an inner emptiness. I know these people. I like them, trust them. I have been there. Already in "Only Children," though, I noticed another theme: self-knowledge, self-possession. Cora's opening reverie contains a striking sentence: "She had a vision of herself as a figure outside her own self-knowledge, emblematic, almost sacrificial." Writing of how Cora has changed since the separation, Hadley says: "But in the past she had been passionately available to her friends, beyond the act of herself." Then, at the climax of the book's one passionate love scene: "She succumbed, experiencing herself opened out and pressed flat, against the white background, liberated from possession of herself." I may have been wrong about the absence of sex, but I was right in seeing Hadley's focus as primarily internal. The events of the latter part of the book, and the narrative twist that connects these two stories after all, are merely the plot devices that keep one reading eagerly. They turn out almost peripheral to the main point, which is the selfhood of these separate individuals, the balance between what they must find inside

themselves and what they must give to or take from others, and the human miracle that can turn separation into understanding. There were times when Tessa Hadley reminded me of the more domestic side of Ian McEwan, as in *SATURDAY* or *THE CHILD IN TIME*. The emotional realism of her characters and their unexpected connections put me in mind of the Penelope Lively of *THE PHOTOGRAPH*. And though Hadley is strictly contemporary, she shares a sense of quiet emotional rightness with Penelope Fitzgerald, an author whom I greatly admire. She deserves her place on the NYT list, and I look forward to reading more by her.

Few contemporary authors equal Tessa Hadley in her eloquence of language or ability to dissect marital relationships. Bravo.

Thank you, Tessa Hadley, for illuminating the unknowable reaches of lovers' relationships. I love your wonderful stories. Great ending for *The London Train*! Perfect!

Hadley has explored relationships carefully and slowly, letting small details reveal large issues and truths. The exploration is almost surgical. The characters need to make new decisions as each layer of a situation is revealed. Two couples whose lives turn out to be intertwined have their stories told: the fog of middle age yearnings with its ability to obscure what life has really brought will strike readers of a certain age as revelatory. The author's style is engaging and Anglophiles (even though the book also takes place in Wales) will enjoy it.

This book is really 2 interlocked stories about a man who is trying to reestablish a relationship with his daughter and a woman who is sorting out her life in the midst of her own struggles. Without revealing too much, they are both hurting the ones they love while trying to find their way to happiness for themselves. When the story shifts it takes a bit to get into the rhythm and I did like the fact that the author worked at writing in a different voice with a different view of the world.

The London Train is really two stories in one that merge as the book enters its second half. We are first introduced to Paul who is on his second marriage but most definitely feeling an itch to do something different. He goes out in search of his daughter Pia who became pregnant by an unlikely but sort of obvious person. The second part of the story is about Cora--also running away from her marriage to what seems to be a reasonably nice but unremarkable man. The two meet on a train from Paddington and end up putting what you may call many embers into the fire. In many ways a

traditional love story about two individuals who happen upon each other by chance. Look out for what in my opinion was a surprise ending in the final pages.

How does Tessa Hadley know these things? This is a lovely book, so many passages are so full of adult feelings perfectly described. Precise and intense but languorously-plotted, these people pursue their normal lives like the rest of us with much greater insight.

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