



A Winter Book

Tove Jansson

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Written with such a lightness of touch that it seems miraculous, these stories are a further revelation of Tove Jansson's heart warming genius. - ALI SMITH

Following the widely acclaimed and bestselling *The Summer Book*, here is a *Winter Book* collection of some of Tove Jansson's best loved and most famous stories. Drawn from youth and older age, and spanning most of the twentieth century, this newly translated selection provides a thrilling showcase of the great Finnish writer's prose, scattered with insights and home truths. It has been selected and is introduced by Ali Smith, and there are afterwords by Philip Pullman, Esther Freud and Frank Cottrell Boyce.

The Winter Book features thirteen stories from Tove Jansson's first book for adults, *The Sculptor's Daughter* (1968) along with seven of her most cherished later stories (from 1971 to 1996), translated into English and published here for the first time.

As smooth and odd and beautiful as sea-worn driftwood, as full of light and air as the Nordic summer. We are lucky to have these stories collected at last. - Philip Pullman

"A Winter Book" offers what proper books so peerlessly can – the sense of a unique and authentic voice that speaks to the reader across time and culture, heart to heart. - Boyd Tonkin, The Independent

A Winter Book Details

Date : Published 2006 by Sort Of Books (first published January 1st 1998)

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From Reader Review A Winter Book for online ebook

Richard Moss says

A Winter Book is a collection of Tove Jansson's short stories. She is of course best known as the creator of the Moomins, but her work for adults has become increasingly appreciated in recent years.

I came to this having read A Summer Book, which although read partly as a series of short stories, centred entirely on a grandmother and granddaughter, and their adventures and relationship on a Finnish island.

It was heavily autobiographical - and A Winter Book also clearly draws much on Jansson's life. But this is a more disparate and diverse work, drawn actually from five different short story collections. And in fact it isn't always set in winter.

It may then lack the cohesion of A Summer Book but nevertheless it has the same capacity to enchant, delight and move.

The stand-out story features a woman alone on a Finnish island who becomes obsessed with a squirrel that has invaded her solitude. At times an irritation, it also becomes a source of consolation and a break into her loneliness. It is one of the best short stories I have read.

Some of the 20 stories focus on childhood, others on old age. There are moments of magic and wonder. At one point a girl drops a lantern into an iceberg, and watches the illuminated block of ice disappear into the night. Another story sees the whole of Helsinki gain the power of flight.

Some are more playful with form - one tale is a series of letters; another appears to be extracts of fan mail and odd requests to the author; another a series of almost poetic messages from a Japanese superfan.

The collection finishes with a poignant and very real-feeling tale of old age. A woman and her partner come to the sad conclusion they are now too frail to continue to spend their summers on their Finnish island home.

But although there is a melancholic note to this and many stories, this is also a book about living and joy. It confirmed to me just what a special talent Jansson was.

Annina says

Bisschen den Winter verlängern. Es hat ein paar sehr tolle Kurzgeschichten drin. Da werde ich die Bücher dazu auch noch lesen.

Teresa says

Last July I read Jansson's The Summer Book and then bought this one, saving it for the winter. Not that all of these stories, selected from Jansson's earlier collections and most previously untranslated, are set in winter--

or even in the winter of a life, though those of the third, and last, section are.

The stories of the first two sections are the first-person narrations of an unnamed, feisty, stubborn young child. She rolls a huge stone home up the stairs; she tags along oblivious to where she's not wanted; she claims an iceberg as her own. When she is older, she sets out to sail solo around the archipelago, at the wink of her mother, hoping to dodge her father.

The story that leads off the last section, and the only one written in third-person, is my favorite. In "The Squirrel" an aging woman, alone on her island as winter approaches, keeps reminding herself of the supplies she wants to replenish before she can no longer get her boat out. (She has plenty of canned food: she is mostly worried about her Madeira.) She keeps putting off her tasks...and then the squirrel arrives. It's a funny story about accepting and embracing the notion of 'travelling light' (the name of the penultimate story), and even about a sort of 'taking leave' (the title of the last).

Fionnuala says

If you liked 'The Summer Book', you'll love these stories, especially the later ones which, like 'The Summer Book' are set on one of the many islands off the Finnish coast. Self sufficiency is the gospel here, quite a fantastic notion now in our fiercely consumer oriented world of today. There are some out and out gems - The Squirrel and Travelling Light were my favourites plus the one about the iceberg. And the final story about accepting the incapacities of old age, along with the losses of freedom they bring, was very sobering. How can we hope to escape all that if even the intrepid, fearless Tove Jansson has to bow to age? But we do, don't we...

Elina Mustikkakummun Anna says

Hieno kokoelma sisältää Tove Janssonin aiemmin eri kokoelmissa julkaistuja novelleja. Nautin kovasti Janssonin kirjoitustyylistä yleensäkin ja myös tämän kokoelman luin erittäin mielelläni.

Amy says

I think -- and believe me, I don't say this lightly -- that Tove Jansson's The Summer Book is my favourite book of all time. So, in all honesty, I couldn't help but come to its twin A Winter Book hoping desperately for the same witty, profound and beautifully observed stories of love, life and growing up. I wasn't disappointed: it really is quietly lovely and, in my opinion, close to perfect.

Much more personal than The Summer Book (although that was based on Jansson's own experiences, too), I felt that you learn more about the author by watching how she and other characters relate to the world and deal with the unexpected. Like Summer, it focuses on young girls and elderly ladies and the differences and similarities between the two. All her stories have such a light-handed touch but still manage to feel infinitely profound, above and beyond many writers with loftier ambitions.

I'm gushing, aren't I? Regardless, I think Tove Jansson is a genius.

Mai Laakso says

Tämä novellikirja sisältää novelleja 26 vuoden ajalta useammasta eri novellikirjasta. Kirja sisältää 32 novellia. Ehkä kokoelmien sekavuus teki kirjan lukemisen raskaaksi, jonka vuoksi annoin tähtiä noin vähän. Tove Janssonin tuotanto on todella laaja ja siihen kuuluu Muumikirjojen lisäksi runsaasti sarjakuvakirjoja, runoja, novelleja ja romaanuja. Mielestäni hän on parhaimmillaan Muumikirjoissa. Novellikirjoista Kesäkirja on paras. Jos Viestin novelleista pitäisi nostaa yksi, niin se olisi ehdottomasti Nukkekaappi. Olen lukenut Nukkekaappi-novellikirjan ja Viestissä on viisi Nukkekaapin novellia. Lisäksi siinä on novelleja Meddelande, Seuraleikki, Kuuntelija, Kevyt kantamus ja Reilua peliä novellikirjoista. Monipuolinen, ajaton, mutta liian sekava kokoelma.

Calzean says

I enjoyed the first two parts more as Jansson captures her childhood in some great stories and in the such a believable child then teen voice.

Nikki says

A Winter Book is a collection of some of Tove Jansson's less famous writing — i.e., this isn't the Moomins. Instead, this is a selection of short stories written throughout her life, many of them autobiographical or otherwise revealing. The stories are generally quiet set pieces, often with vivid images at the centre — the girl rolling a stone home; the girl throwing her torch onto an island of floating ice and lighting it up, but too scared to jump across...

'Quiet' is definitely the word that comes to mind most; the prose (even accounting for translation) is unassuming and relatively down to earth. Things are just so.

The writing isn't bad, but it's not the sort of short story writing I actually really enjoy, though at times it can be done really well (thinking Raymond Carver).

Reviewed for The Bibliophilian.

Claire McAlpine says

The daughter of creative parents, her father a sculptor and her mother an illustrator, Jansson's imagination had been given full rein in childhood and it comes out in the opening stories of A Winter Book, told from the perspective of a girl, whom I am sure was the author herself. In fact all through the book, I was often left with the feeling I had been reading non-fiction. This selection draws from five collections presenting the best of her short fiction.

In one story entitled Snow, she writes of a girl and her mother being snowed in, the light slowly disappearing

as the windows are covered up and expresses her delight in having escaped the outside world, warm in the safe and secure presence of her cheerful mother.

"..we have gone into hibernation. Nobody can get in any longer and no one can get out!"

I looked carefully at her and understood that we were saved. At last we were absolutely safe and protected. This menacing snow had hidden us inside in the warmth for ever and we didn't have to worry a bit about what went on there outside.

Jansson spent every summer living and working on a tiny island off the coast of Finland, returning to Helsinki for the more difficult months and clearly spent many summers in boats and on the island during her childhood.

Another memorable story was The Boat and Me; she is given her first boat at twelve-years-old and wastes no time in asserting her new-found independence, taking the boat out along the coast to look at her favourite spots from another perspective, with little regard for the hours that pass by or the hearts that might be fretting.

I go slowly, hugging the shore, into each creek and out round each headland; I mustn't miss anything out because it's a ritual. Now I'm about to see my territory from the sea for the first time, that's important.

I pulled up the anchor-stone and rowed straight out into the path of the moon. Of course the moon's path is lovely as a picture in calm weather, but when it's rough, it's even more beautiful, all splinters and flakes from precious stones like sailing through a sea set with diamonds.

And at that very moment Dad turned up...

My favourite story though, is the one that follows, in a section entitled Travelling Light, signifying the latter years, where annoyance is more likely the emotion of choice to greet uninvited guests in place of the enthusiasm or delight of her more youthful years. Even when that guest is an island-hopping squirrel.

Either I am incredibly gullible or this story will teach you something new about the intelligence of squirrels, as a reader I was right there with squirrel and hoping for the best, while Jansson was lining up his escape options, ill-inclined to do anything to encourage the lonesome animal to stay.

She didn't care about squirrels, or fly fishermen, or anyone, but just let herself slip down into a great despondency and admit she was disappointed. 'How can this be possible?' she thought frankly. 'How can I be so angry that they've come at all and then so dreadfully disappointed that they haven't landed?'

Not just a quiet, honest collection of stories, but containing wonderful black and white photos that add to the atmosphere the author evokes and make us feel the heaviness and significance of that final story, Taking Leave, the last visit, when the nets have become too heavy to pull, the boat too difficult to handle, the sea too unpredictable for two aging women. It is with a quiet sadness but knowledge that many happy hours were

spent, that we turn the last page on that final visit.

Antonomasia says

2/3 not my kind of thing, 1/3 very good. And many of these short stories aren't even set in winter. I'd long thought *A Winter Book* some kind of blatant cash-in by editors, a bunch of stories from other collections chucked together as an ersatz companion to Jansson's lovely *Summer Book*. But it was on a special offer, and it was nearly winter, so I got it anyway.

The stories are divided into three sections: 'Snow', 'Flotsam & Jetsam' and 'Travelling Light'.

The first two lots are semi-autobiographical tales set during Jansson's bohemian childhood, many from *The Sculptor's Daughter*; her mother was also an artist, a book illustrator. These pieces are what one might aspire to on a short creative writing course. (Though on most only one person – not me – and the tutor, would get close, for they are excellent examples of what they are.) Prettily brittle, plenty of background detail left unexplained, slight melancholy, occasional episodes of magic realism, child narrators; you know the sort of thing. The naive child narrator with limited understanding really didn't work for me; I enjoyed hearing more about Tove Jansson's life, but wanted her reflective adult perspective on these scenes. What I did like here: beautiful nature descriptions; the way she quietly doesn't seem to identify herself with the women or the men, at a time of fairly set gender roles. 'Flotsam & Jetsam' contains mostly summer holiday stories and would have been more enjoyable read outdoors in the sun, and even not all of 'Snow' is explicitly in winter.

'The Stone' - my favourite from these two sections, and the only one I unreservedly liked. The narrator's age is indeterminate, perhaps an artistic, childlike adult. If you have carried big heavy things home through the street, or lived in a block of flats that was a bit too neighbourly for your liking, it may strike some chords. Also contains a lovely idea of making a room for oneself and the thing carried in public, the kind of thing that can be magic or simply psychological technique depending on your perspective. I also appreciated 'Annie', as if exchanging reminiscences with the narrator about an experience few friends share.

I might have liked the story 'Snow' if I hadn't read another (more exciting, less childlike) take on the same subject a couple of days earlier - being snowed in right up to the chimney of the house - 'At the Bottom of the Snow Ocean' by Gunnar Gunnarsson, in the anthology *Christmas in Scandinavia*.

I was thoroughly disillusioned, treating this as a book to get finished and out of the way, when there turned out to be three gems in the first half of 'Travelling Light' - the section which has stories of old age.

'The Squirrel' is now my favourite short story I've read this year, and one of my favourites since joining Goodreads. Perhaps this protagonist is an alter-ego of Jansson if she'd been single and less successful. A middle-aged woman living a spartan life alone on a small island, slightly alcohol-dependent, sees a squirrel has arrived on shore on a piece of flotsam. I love the efforts to keep life organised, and the mixed feelings about the squirrel - she is fascinated by this new mammalian company and cares how the squirrel is, yet doesn't want to feel responsible for it or keep it as a pet. I was reminded how intense the relationship-in-one's-head with an animal can be, trying to determine what a creature might think or feel when you can't ask it, how it clicks into the internal working models that textbooks associate with looking after a child. There is also a lovely photograph of the author holding a tame red squirrel.

'Letters from Klara' - hilarious correspondence to various friends and officials from an irascible older woman of literary inclination, as strong-minded and sarcastic as any bookish grumpy old man from a comic novel. I never thought Tove Jansson could be this funny, and I wish there was a whole book about Klara.

'Messages' - is at least as funny. Are these short paragraphs answerphone messages, excerpts from letters, or

both? Manufacturers ask about making Moomin loo paper and similarly absurd licensed products. Aspiring writers and kids with homework want her to help them. Her partner leaves notes about popping out on errands. Mad people write mad things. Lonely people write because they mustn't have a friend who'd identify with a thought the way they think Jansson would.

'Taking Leave' is the lovely final piece in which Jansson and her partner come to understand that they are getting too old to manage on the island and say goodbye to aspects of life there.

Inconsistent is perhaps the accepted nature of short story collections, but this one provoked more mixed feelings in me than most. I'm very glad I persevered to the final third and found the wonderful stories there. What I hadn't expected earlier in the book was that it would make me want to read more of Jansson (as long as there is a adult narrator).

notgettingenough says

I wish the short story commanded more respect. We live in a world where anything that isn't a novel is 'a short story'. I doubt one of these, not really a book by Tove Jansson, but a collection of her work put together by others, stands up as a 'story'. It's an odd hotchpotch of pieces. Why isn't that a word used more often for writing? Why can't we have a book of 'pieces'?

Rest here: <https://alittleteaalittlechat.wordpress.com/2017/07/10/review-tove-janssons-inconsistent/>

Mosco says

5 stelle alla prima parte, 3 alla seconda, 1 alla scelta editoriale. Totale 3 stelle.

tropo breve, si legge in un amen e quando si inizia ad affezionarsi alla piccola protagonista il libro cambia totalmente stile e personaggio. I racconti poetici dell'infanzia felice della scrittrice lasciano troppo presto il posto, nell'ultimo terzo del libro, a, come dire? post-it, aforismi, lettere, pensieri, schizzi di lei adulta. Non brutti per carità, ma il fatto che Iperborea nella 4 di copertina non ne faccia parola qualcosa vorrà dire. Ho cercato su diversi siti, quasi tutti acqua in bocca. QUindi di un libro già troppo breve di suo, una parte consistente è altro da quello che ci si aspetta.

Laura says

Lähes puolen vuoden lukemisen jälkeen sain viimein tämän päätökseen. Osa novelleista oli tuttuja jo muista kokoelmista, ja oikeastaan ne muissa julkaisut mielestäni kuuluisivatkin ensisijaisesti "oikeille paikoilleen", ne pääsevät paremmin oikeuksiinsa alkuperäisissä kokoelmissaan, osina niitä kokonaisuuksia, joihin ne on alunperin kirjoitettu.

Mutta koska ehdottomia lempipareita tässä kuitenkin olivat ne muualla julkaisemattomat, ansaitsevat tämän kokoelman novellit ehdottomasti 4,5 tähteä. Ehkä vähillä enemmänkin.

Andy says

In the midst of a UK winter, with short days and news abounding of severe weather, it seemed a nice idea to read this well regarded collection of wintry stories.

It wasn't. I persevered, against my better instincts, through a third of this book despite not finding it especially fulfilling. The writing was good, but the stories were too short to allow any genuine attachment or interest to develop.

Instead, I looked for a full-length novel by the same author, and was relieved to cast this collection aside in favour of "The True Deceiver" - a "proper" novel.
