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From Reader Review Nine Inches: Stories for online ebook

Althea Ann says

Received this through Goodreads' First Reads giveaway! THANK YOU!

I had an interest in this book after reading Perotta's 'The Leftovers' for my post-apocalyptic book club. There's nothing apocalyptic here, but Perotta's stories are all about social entropy.

I actually feel that most of these stories work even better than 'The Leftovers' which features an ensemble cast and many situations. The short stories here each focus on one situation, and that tight focus intensifies the experience.

Suburbia and high-school figure prominently in these stories - nothing flashy or exotic, or even that dramatic - but Perotta describes the difficulty of being an individual trying to navigate through life, and captures the tragedies of ordinary lives.

Contents:

Backrub - A teen boy has unpleasant encounters with a local cop.

Grade My Teacher - A teacher confronts the student who gave her a bad write-up online.

The Smile on Happy Chang's Face - Conflict at Little League, and conflict at home.

Kiddie Pool - A man breaks into a deceased neighbor's garage and confronts both memories and revelations.

Nine Inches - A school dance chaperone confronts his own feelings and the life choices he's made.

Senior Season - An injured football player adjusts (or fails to adjust) to his new status, and finally meets his elderly neighbor.

One-Four-Five - A divorcé gets back into playing rock guitar.

The Chosen Girl - A lonely old woman becomes obsessed with a young girl in her neighborhood, who seems neglected, and in a member of a religious cult.

The Test-Taker - A boy who's getting paid to take the SAT for other students is assigned to take the test for one of his own classmates.

The All-Night Party - A high-school party chaperone has to work alongside a cop she has a grudge against for the evening.

There's a lot more to all of these stories than my little aide-memoire summaries above... Perotta is truly a masterful writer.

Michaela Carter says

A policeman pulls boys over and secretly gives them backrubs. A grade school teacher googles herself and finds a new entry on gradeyourteacher.com, one that is anything but favorable, which causes her to question her life. A middle-aged married man breaks into his dead neighbor's garage to use his air compressor to blow up a kiddie pool, but finds something much more disturbing.

Tom Perrotta's new book of stories, Nine Inches, measures not only the permissible distance between middle

school kids in a slow dance, but that less definable space between responsibility and desire, who we think we are and who we want to be. Grounded in the disillusionment of suburbia, each of these tales rides on life's irony straight to the heart of our need for connection and meaning.

You'll look at your neighbors, people in line at the grocery store, the pizza delivery guy, even your own parents, and wonder what their lives are really like.

I love books of short stories because you can read an entire story in a single sitting. And Tom Perrotta's stories are among the best I've read. Ever. (Apologies to Carver fans.)

Ally says

I received this book through Goodreads First Reads, and I'm still excited that I did! I loved "Little Children", "The Leftovers", and "Election", so getting a book that I was looking forward to three months ahead of schedule was a lovely present.

Perrotta's short stories are about loss, disappointment, failure, and the people who bring these conditions upon themselves. Other reviewers have called them sad, but I'm not the best judge of that. I love to read a story and then think, ouch.

These stories don't have twists so much as they have sinkholes. We're given a recognizable premise--a high school teacher, a football player with a concussion, a retiree with a loveless marriage--and a problem--a poor performance review, a season on the sidelines, an air compressor inconveniently in the neighbor's yard--and slowly, grievances pile up, bad decisions are made, and eventually someone does something so delightfully and painfully inappropriate that the original problem isn't solved, exactly, but becomes irrelevant in the face of the new difficulty.

The arrangement of stories in this collection also plays with the reader's expectations. The first story sets up some great problems--a stalker cop, a dead-end job, being the only one of your friends not accepted to college--but these all turn out to be straw men; the real problem is only that which the narrator brings upon himself, and it turns out that this isn't the first time he's done so. The subsequent stories continue in this vein, presenting the reader first with a very interesting problem--like the homophobic dad in "The Smile on Happy Chang's Face", whose issues with his son are left unresolved--and then swerving around it to a different, more complex problem. In this way, every wrinkle that comes up seems as if it could be the crux of the story, until one actually is. In "Kiddie Pool", we think the problem will be that the main character is caught trespassing. Then, we think he'll have a heart attack. Eventually, he's the one to discover something that casts decades of his past in doubt.

This formula of delayed expectation makes the final story in the collection, "The All-Night Party", much better than it would be alone. Will the problem stem from the teenagers sleeping together? The drunk, rejected girl? The self-important cop? The frazzled mother who hits her daughter's classmate? As it turns out...none of the above. There is no problem. As far as we know, everything turns out fine. It's quite startling.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

Let this be a lesson to all that you should probably actually read the book jacket if you want to know what a book is about. I read the blurb “Tom Perrotta’s first true collection features ten stories” and was sold. True stories by a famous author? Yay! I thought I would be diving in to something similar to Sedaris. Maybe not funny stories, but essays that would let me in to Perrotta’s private life. I should have kept reading. The blurb that hooked me actually goes on to explain this is a collection of 10 fictional stories which cover everything from Little League to infidelity. So there you have it – I’m a bibliophile who apparently doesn’t know how to read. Whoops.

I’m a gal to likes to read almost EVERYTHING. The only things I really steer clear from are super-Christian-lit and short stories (the exceptions being the aforesaid Sedaris-ish authors and a handful of Stephen King collections – I mean, it’s King so the exception had to be made right?). If you are a person who likes the short story, this might get a better rating from you. Me???? I don’t like a taste of a character’s life. Short stories are the hors d’oeuvre of literature. I prefer a novel that lets me dive in like a seven course meal. Still, the writing was solid, it was a quick read, the stories were all kind of dark and murky (which I was in the mood for) and, to give credit where credit is due, this book has the best title/cover art combo of the entire year.

I’ve also neither read nor seen the movie versions of *Election* and *Little Children*, but after reading this collection have added them both to my never-ending TBR list. I think I’m going to end up loving Perrotta’s work a little before it’s all said and done.

Jenny Shank says

My daughter reported that her first-grade teacher said, “Sometimes when people get really sad, they go into the garage, close the door, and leave the car running.”

Furious, I fantasized about just what I’d like to say to this teacher, who I’d always found suspect. I complained to the principal, who made the teacher call me. She sounded so pitiful as she explained how she’d uttered this during a lesson on carbon monoxide that I held back from yelling at her. Instead I calmly told her that suicide was not an appropriate topic for first-graders and channeled my rage into referring to her as “Morticia” around the house.

If I were a character in a Tom Perrotta story, I’d have slugged Morticia. Or scattered trash around her yard. Or I’d have launched into an Ahab-like quest to convince the school board to fire her, which would ultimately result in my own undoing.

Perrotta’s six sharp, popular novels, including *Election* and *Little Children*, established him as the bard of neighborhood grievance. The stories in his new *Nine Inches* function as revenge fantasy fulfillment for those of us who avoid pushing confrontations past polite disagreement. Perrotta perfectly captures the low-level agony the people we’re forced to engage with — neighbors, teachers, co-workers, Little League coaches, students and spouses — can cause us.

Perrotta's stories often build up to that moment when, if characters act prudently, their major problems will sort themselves out. Instead, Perrotta's characters hurtle toward conflict, betrayal or self-sabotage, leaving them with unfamiliar lives. His archetypal suburban setting enhances the drama and comedy, because of the assumption that people who've earned these good houses, jobs, schools and communities are supposed to know how to behave.

Take Donald, the luckless high school graduate in "Backrub." He'd achieved high grades and SAT scores, but no college accepted him. His guidance counselor "insisted that it was just a freak occurrence, a perfect storm of bad luck and rotten demographics." So while his friends head to Stanford and Pomona, embittered Donald delivers pizza and plans to apply again the next year. But he becomes accustomed to the pizza delivery lifestyle, is drawn into a pot-selling operation and leaves his safety school applications to the last minute, answering the question "Why Fairfield?" with "You're my Safety School, [expletive]."

Time and again, Perrotta's characters pass up the chance to set their lives back on track and instead choose to go down in a blaze of glory, to the reader's vicarious delight.

"The Smile on Happy Chang's Face," which appeared in the Best American Short Stories anthology, is one of Perrotta's finest, capturing the suburban microcosm that swirls around the Little League championship game. Much is at stake for Jack, the home plate umpire who is secretly rooting against the team coached by his hated next-door neighbor, Carl, who "had ripped the sleeves off his sweatshirt, the better to display the rippling muscles he worked for like a dog down at Bally's." Jack and Carl's mutual animosity goes beyond neighborly disagreement, however — Carl witnessed Jack punch his gay son, what Jack calls "the one thing I'll regret forever," leading his wife to divorce him. All the stresses in the men's lives come to bear on the action at the plate in the story's surprising conclusion.

Perrotta's stories are up-to-the-minute, featuring a teacher "conducting a routine self-Google" and finding an unflattering profile on a teacher-rating website; a beautiful girl vamping to capture the perfect selfie to post online; and a high school senior forced to contend with the rue, social ostracism and girlfriend loss that comes when his mom makes him quit the football team after a concussion.

In the title story, teachers must assure students stay nine inches apart while dancing after a prior dance degenerated into "a drunken brawl/gropefest" and the footage achieved Internet infamy.

For those of us who curtail our emotions to avoid negative repercussions, reading Perrotta's stories, in which the characters let their emotions reign, is a grand way to blow off steam before attending the next PTA meeting.

Jenny Shank's first novel, *The Ringer*, won the High Plains Book Award.

<http://www.dallasnews.com/entertainme...>

Dallas Morning News

By JENNY SHANK Special Contributor

Published: 16 November 2013 12:12 PM

Patrick says

My office had a staff meeting a while back. It was a very busy time, and the organization was going through some changes, and morale was getting a little low. The head of our department had everyone take two post-it notes and asked us all to sum up in one word how we felt in our work life, and how we felt in our home life, and write them on each post it. The work results were unsurprising – words like busy, challenging, stressful, etc. were ubiquitous. But the home descriptions were shocking to me. Words like ‘lonely’ and ‘sad’ and ‘mess’ were shockingly common. Overwhelmingly the results of the home life situations were bleak. The point of the exercise was to show that although we’re all busy and there is a lot of transition going on at work, let’s not forget how much is going on off the books in our personal life, and be cognizant of that in our work lives. I walked away shocked at just how sad my co-worker’s lives sounded, wondering exactly what was going on in each of them that they apparently kept buried beneath the surface in our daily interactions.

My co-worker’s sad private lives is what Tom Perrotta writes about, and he does it astonishing depth and insight. Each story in ‘Nine Inches’ details the quiet desperation of American lives that Thoreau referred to, and do so in ways unexpected and understated. Perrotta in general is such an understated writer. His stories always feel so real, so lived-in, but they never take the obvious route. It’s not so much that he zigs when you expect him to zag, it’s more that he looks the obvious route in the eye, shrugs, and slowly meanders down the other path, before stopping and going home. That sounds like a criticism, but it’s not. In a way, it’s refreshingly truthful. The world is such a big place, and we’re all so insignificant in it, despite our relentless solipsism. In his stories (and novels), Perrotta highlights both of these facts—that everything we do feels so important, so meaningful, when, at the end of the day, it’s just another person doing another thing.

I can’t do his writing justice in a review. He just evokes a certain tone, certain feelings, that are everywhere around you, but you can’t put your finger on it. Each of the stories in this book conjures a certain kind of sadness, the kind that my co-workers apparently feel regularly, but don’t express between nine and five. But Perrotta does so in a way that feels very natural. It’s not showy, it’s just perfect.

Ken says

Though it's true of many books, Tom Perrotta's short story collection bears out H.D. Thoreau's words: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." In these 10 stories, we see multiple characters of various ages yearning for things even they cannot identify. Though all are suburban types, some are middle-aged men, others middle-aged women, and a few teenagers. Perrotta has a sure hand with all of these ages, thanks to his established track record with novels.

If you're a fan of *Bad Haircut*, Perrotta's beguiling debut collection of stories about a kid growing up in the 70s, you'll probably find *Nine Inches* a tad wanting. Part of the reason is the lack of continuity due to a variety of characters and situations; part of it is that some of these stories just work a whole lot better than others.

As you might expect of Perrotta, a lot of cops and teachers and wayward teens here. Much edgier than past pieces, too. The opening story is a bit disjointed. "Backrub" is named for a creepy cop who comes on to a teen, but that plot almost plays second fiddle to the young protagonist's other problems. It comes across as disjointed.

"The Smile on Happy Chang's Face" works much better -- an almost existential tale of a man in crisis umpiring a Little League Championship game. In a collection where some of the endings try too hard, "Happy Chang" nails it with style. "Kiddie Pool" is one of many short exercises exploring marriages in crisis

-- usually from the man's point of view (cue Bono, "But I still haven't found what I'm looking for..."). "Grade My Teacher," seems a bit dated, as it tells the story of a teacher wrongly dissed on a teacher-rating site (the model of which is seldom used in the Facebook age).

Some stories try too hard to be deep ("The Chosen Girl" about a religious cult), some seem like trifles designed to kill time between stories in a sweet way ("The Test Taker" about a nerd who takes SATs for dumb, popular kids), and others are worth the cost of admission, even if they are flawed ("The All-Night Party" about an overworked, unhappy housewife who gets way too involved during chaperone duties at an all-night graduation party).

Despite any shortcomings, however, there's no denying that the stories go down like candy. That is, while you might quibble with some of the plots and endings, the going is always smooth, assured diction in the hands of a pro. If you like Perrotta, you'll like this collection. And if you like mini-dramas dealing with the vanilla existence we call "suburban life," this is your perfect ten....

P.S. Not a fan of the cover, which is a cheap joke on the story, "Nine Inches," which is actually about the distance teachers must keep dancers apart at a middle school dance. Hopefully, it's just the ARC.

Melki says

There's really no one better than Perrotta at getting inside the mind of the modern suburban male.

Picture a guy sporting a full-on "dad bod." He misses the glory days when he could go all night and take no prisoners. Though he loves the family he has created, he blames his wife and kids for robbing him of his youth, his freedom. Perhaps the wife is not as forthcoming as she once was. This is why he's considering an affair. Life didn't turn out quite the way he had hoped. He's not exactly miserable; it just seems that everyone else is having a whole lot more fun.

There are ten terrific stories here. Most of them concern good old everyday life - work, school, spats with neighbors and softball rivalries. Not all of them are about middle-aged men, but those were my favorites. The main theme seems to be dissatisfaction. Everyone is longing for something else - the way things used to be, younger, smoother flesh, and a chance to do things differently if given a second chance.

I honestly hated to turn the last page of this collection. Life seems duller without one of these stories to look forward to every day.

Perhaps a red convertible would lighten my mood . . .

Lyn says

Chuck Palhniuk without the over the top creep factor and with some similarities to Jonathon Franzen in his dramatic use of ordinary settings.

The suburbs.

This is home to much of Homo sapiens westernus and in this habitat many of us upright animals live and some even thrive. Writer Tom Perrotta has captured in this 2013 collection of shorter works an omniscient vision of Suburban America and sees in the otherwise everyday and commonplace a place for his realistic fiction to demonstrate an extraordinary depth of emotion and social complexity.

Perrotta has offered us an anthology of a dozen or so short stories that differ noticeably in theme and subject. From the kooky but hilarious "Backrub" to the somber and introspective "Kiddie Pool" to the dreamily disturbing "The Chosen Girl".

I'd say my favorite was "The Smile on Happy Chang's Face". This is on the surface about a little league game gone awry, but like all of these stories, Perrotta has layered this creation into a three dimensional landscape of complexity and irony, and all rooted in a recognizable portrait of us.

Recommended.

William Lawrence says

Insightful, character driven, and hilarious at times, Perrotta's collection Nine Inches is so worth the read. I'm glad I stumbled onto his work again years after reading Election. "Backrub" "Grade my teacher" "Nine Inches" and "One-Four-Five" are all five-star stories. Some of the others didn't keep my attention as much, a matter of content, but the quality of writing is all good throughout.

Cindy says

This book is a short story collection taking place in suburbia. Told with humor and snappy dialogue I really found myself immersed in the family relationships, problems and everyday situations that take place in a typical community. After each story I was left wanting more! I really like Perrotta's writing style and the development of his characters. This is an engaging book and the cover and title certainly get your attention! (Take your mind out of the gutter!)

Oh, I won this book through Goodreads (thank you!) and give it 3.5 stars!

Ps...for those of you who are wondering...One of the short stories is called Nine Inches. It is about chaperoning a middle school dance where the partners are required to keep 9 inches apart while slow dancing. The chaperones have a tape measure! Now what were you all thinking! :)

Jennifer Lane says

Twisted Tales of Disillusionment and Divorce

If you've read or seen *Election* and *Little Children*, you know what off-kilter characters Tom Perotta creates. And we get to meet a lot of these divorcees, criminals, adulterers, dirty cops, and teenagers with grudges in this collection of short stories. What amazes me is how likable Perotta makes these despicable characters. It's like life has given these sad sacks a tough road, so of course they choose to muck it up even further.

Though the author seems to return often to stories about teachers and students, there is a good amount of variety in points of view. We start with a recent high school graduate who shocked everyone when he didn't get into college, like all of his honor student peers, and now works as a pizza delivery man. He has to fend off a local policeman who likes to pull him over and make sexual advances. Though he shows panache in handling the cop, he shoots himself in the foot in a major area of his life.

Next is a teacher who feels hurt by a negative comment on grademyteacher.com. She confronts the student who wrote it and surprisingly they bond, almost becoming bffs. The teacher has an urge to do something unethical, and like most of Perotta's characters, she goes for it.

One of the most depressing stories is about a teenage boy who suffers the aftermath of a football concussion. The story accurately shows how a life can fall apart from Post-Concussion syndrome. We can only hope for a happy ending for the boy, but for Perotta's characters, happy endings often don't exist.

However, sometimes he lets his characters get revenge, like in the story of a smart high school boy who gets paid to take the SAT for other students. Don't mess with him!

Overall, I admire the writing but not the bleak view of humanity shown in these stories.

Caroline says

NO SPOILERS

On the surface, Tom Perrotta seems concerned with simple matters. He doesn't write elaborate historical fiction that requires involved research. He doesn't write ingenious fantasy or insert clever magical realism elements in regular fiction. He writes about everyday people going about their daily lives--but not really. He writes provocatively about these people. He pries out their secrets, exposes their private agonies and moral dilemmas. In "Nine Inches," he tackles uncomfortable topics as varied as a divorced man's debilitating loneliness to cheating (both academic and adulterous). What they have in common is their suburban setting, a Perrotta trademark. One thing's for sure: in Perrotta's world, the suburbs are far from vanilla.

The stories aren't equally strong. In each, Perrotta strove for a thought-provoking, sobering message but was too heavy-handed in about half; however, it's a testament to his talent that even these weak stories are entertaining. Those stories that succeed really succeed. Their message is subtle. They're often surprising in an inventive way. One of the best contains a twist. A few beg to be extended to novel length. In its direct and very engaging style, Perrotta's writing is reminiscent of Sara Gruen's and Andre Dubus III's. The stories are wholly character-driven, and the characters themselves are authentic. Perrotta is never afraid to portray warts and all. It's dark and refreshing all at once.

Stacy says

Tom Perrotta has put together a collection of 10 short stories that pull at you. He finds those emotions that you have carefully sealed away – despair, loneliness, awkwardness- and brings them floating right back up to the surface for you to have another look. Brilliant, and funny around the edges, he explores our deepest longings and fears. His stories hit you with the punch that one single choice, no matter how big or how small, can change the course of your entire life. They remind us that we often get in the way of our own potential.

For me, each story felt a little bit like watching a Coen brother's film. By the end, I felt like I had swallowed a bitter pill, but was then gently nudged to go on, go on now and enjoy the ride. He sums it up well while finishing the story *One-Four-Five* with this quote “But there was a faint current of dread running beneath his optimism, because good things turned to sh*t all the time, and you couldn’t always see it coming.”

Josh says

I love short stories. I love sad, depressing, twisted, make you think short stories. This collection is chalked full of those kinds of stories. Yet, I didn't love them as a whole. I'm not sure if they were too depressing (although not near as so as others I have gobbled up) or if reading just before Christmas time was the contributing factor? I did really like a few of them; "Kiddie Pool" and "Smile on Happy Chang's face" were good enough to round this from a 2 star to a 2.5 (yet I elect my privilege to round down to a 2 simply because I am in a depressed state as I remember these tales).

He certainly has chops as a writer, and I will try him again someday.....someday when I need a reminder that life is full of train wrecks and empty promises.....because like I said, I love that kind of reading.

Scott Foley says

I'm ashamed to admit that this is my first Perrotta book. A friend recommended it to me, and I took his advice mostly because I respect his opinion and I enjoy short stories. Well, I can honestly say that Perrotta instantly made me a fan for life with this collection.

Nine Inches is comprised of several short stories, none of which overtly link together. Thematically, however, each are very similar in how things can go so, so wrong in the blink of an eye.

Not that it's a depressing book. At times, in fact, it's quite funny. Perrotta simply doesn't back off from those dark thoughts we all occasionally entertain. His characters—sometimes deliberately, sometimes accidentally—act upon those dark thoughts, and Perrotta then throws their lives out of control.

It's been a long time since I read an author who fundamentally understands people. He knows us when we're good, he knows us when we're bad, and he captures those moments on the page exquisitely.

His characters are not always likable, but they are real ... they are you ... they are me. They are the versions of us after our lives unravel.

I cannot wait to read Perrotta's other works.

James Thane says

I've enjoyed very much Tom Perrotta's novels, especially *The Abstinence Teacher* and *The Leftovers*, and now I can add to that list his new collections of short stories, *Nine Inches*.

The title story actually involves two teachers who may have missed each other like ships passing in the night and who are now assigned to chaperone a dance. Nine inches is the minimum distance that the dancers are supposed to maintain from each other, but what distance should separate the two main characters, especially when one is now married?

All of these stories involve suburban characters whose lives did not necessarily work out as the American Dream suggested they should, and Perrotta excels at capturing the distance between their aspirations and the reality of their lives. As is always the case in a collection like this, some of the stories are stronger than others, but there's not a weak one in the bunch. This is a book that should appeal to a large number of readers.

Amy says

Every time I read something by Perrotta, I find something new to love. This book was all about respectable people who understand social boundaries and don't cross them...except for that one time. Sometimes they get away with it and sometimes it destroys their whole existence. Risk is a gamble. This is a great collection of stories, but I am completely biased. If you like Perrotta's other work, this will be up your alley.

George says

Really like this collection of stories. The overarching theme seems to be the different forms and shapes that loneliness takes and how we all have to deal with it. I was able to empathize in some part with almost every character in this book and found myself thinking, "yeah, been there, done that" multiple times.

Overall really liked it and thought it was much better than *Tenth of December* which was way overrated and overhyped in my opinion.

Neil McCrea says

I've seen the movie adaptations of *Little Children* and *Election*, but this is my first dip into Perrotta's writing. There has been a lot of hype about him from my circle of friends and the press, and I suspect this is precisely why I've been avoiding him. The book blurbs on this ARC alone make me cringe. "The Steinbeck of suburbia"?!? Steinbeck and Perrotta are so far apart in style and intent that this flippant comparison seems insulting to both. There is also a comparison to Chekhov that seems foolish, and one to Carver that may actually be appropriate. Onward, I shall endeavor to give him a fair shake despite my distaste for the

marketing machine.

Backrub The "perfect" whitebread suburban student fails to get into any of the colleges he applied despite having high SATs, a high GPA, and having done everything "right". Now stuck in a workaday rut as a pizza delivery boy, he finds himself regularly harassed by a cop that just wants to give him a backrub. This story could have been a subplot on a season of *Weeds*, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Grade My Teacher A high school teacher discovers a student has been slagging off about her online, and decides to confront the student about it. This is a solid character study. It's nicely understated when it could easily have turned melodramatic. Perrotta writes women well.

The Smile On Happy Chang's Face An umpire at a little league championship game uses the events of the game to reflect on his estranged relationship with his son. This story ventures into the rarified air of a Raymond Carver story. This one is the first evidence I've had that Perrotta is more than just talented, but may in fact live up to all the hype.

Kiddie Pool A relationship autopsy story. The dead relationship in this case being between a set of neighbors/friends. I didn't initially think too much of the story, but it hit me somewhere painful. I left it feeling sad and angry beyond what I would expect from such a tale.

Nine Inches A new father and Jr High School teacher gets stuck on chaperone duty for the school dance. The environment causes him to re-evaluate his relationships. Solid story, but a little obvious. That's not quite the right word as surprise and novelty isn't the point, but it'll have to do.

Senior Season A sports injury causes a high school senior to re-evaluate his relationships and future plans. This story made me cranky, largely due to my loathing of American high school jock culture. The baggage is entirely mine and has little to do with the quality of the story. If anything Perrotta's ability to dredge up those feelings in me is a mark in his favor.

One-Four-Five In the aftermath of a failed marriage brought about by his own infidelities, a doctor becomes obsessed with the blues. My inner class warrior wanted to bitch slap the protagonist, but by the end I had a fair amount of empathy for him. That was a bit of a trick for Perrotta to pull off.

The Chosen Girl An older widow, whose family has moved away, eases her loneliness by imagining conversations between herself and a neighbor girl who is the member of an uncommon religious sect. Sad and very real, the story is made all the sadder by my personal knowledge of several old ladies in very much the same position.

The Test Taker A socially awkward teen, improves his social life and makes money by taking the SAT for other students. um . . . uh . . . if this were in an urban environment and the clients a bit more troubled, this story could have been about me.

The All-Night Party A single mother is wrangled into chaperoning a safe prom alternative. The event causes her to reflect on her high school choices, and her abilities as a parent. This is the most complex of the stories, at least in terms of action and number of characters, yet after reading the previous nine stories I find that it doesn't distinguish itself in any significant way.

Tom Perrotta is indeed an excellent writer even if his fans are given to hyperbole. Any one of these stories would be deserving of at least 4 stars, but taken as a whole the book only gets a 3. When Raymond Carver

writes about suburban malaise, you get the feeling that no matter how claustrophobic and homogenized the setting he could always find something new and interesting to write about in that milieu. Perrotta, on the other hand, seems to keep circling the same handful of story points repeatedly. I recommend the book, but I suggest taking a significant break from it after each story.
