



Once Upon a Timepiece

Starr Wood

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When Conrad Sands returns a wristwatch to an old flame after 20 years apart, a remarkable chain of events begins. The watch passes through the hands of a gold-digger, a journalist, an enchantress and a professor. It touches the lives of a rogue art collector, a domestic helper, and an environmental campaigner. It influences a reverend's apprentice, a kept wife, and a self-made man. All of them are strangers, yet all are intricately linked in ways that none of them see. A deeply thought-provoking debut novel from Starr Wood, "Once Upon a Timepiece" is a gripping portrayal of humanity's relationship with time and the unseen threads of history that bind us together. Told through a series of twelve inter-connected short stories, it explores memory and regret, ambition and weakness, and the texture of time that lies behind all our lives.

Once Upon a Timepiece Details

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Author : Starr Wood

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From Reader Review Once Upon a Timepiece for online ebook

Andreea says

I got the book from Bo Tree Books and I am really happy that they sent it to me 'cause I can't imagine myself picking this book to read and I'd have missed a great debut novel!

It's a collection of short stories, but they are actually created in such a way that they make a novel. We follow the "adventures" of an antique watch for an entire year. Each of the story is a month of the year and each of the owner of the watch (or the persons close to the owner) is an intriguing and interesting character. This book is full with characters I'd love to know more about, but we only get a glimpse in their life and even if that leaves me with wanting more it has it's magic.

I felt like the mean and naughty characters get punished for their actions and I have mixed feelings about that, but at the end of the day that's what we want to believe, right? Like some sort of karma or a greater being is watching over us (though it's nice to just be nice for the sake of being nice, and not because a superior being is going to punish us).

I read this book in one day. It captures you and you can't put it down because at the end of each story the watch is leaving the owner and you want to know what happens next! It's nice how it comes full circle at the end of the year.

I really liked this book. The writing style holds you reading for hours and you are never bored with it. It was a good book and I can't wait to share it with others because I think it has to travel and meet many characters just like the watch in the book did.

Jane says

Starr Wood is a journalist, writer and economist. He graduated from the LSE and began his career as a journalist working for a variety of news media in London and the Middle East.

Many journalists turn their hand to writing novels but not of them all make the transition quite so impressively. Storytelling is an art and in this collection of short stories we really see this at its best. Once Upon a Timepiece is what it says on the tin. The timepiece, an antique Breitling with a nice price tag is the centrepiece of this book. The Breitling is given to Conrad Sands as a present and he wishes to return it to its previous owner. In each story we learn how and where the watch travels and glimpse into the lives of the people who come into contact with the timepiece. Each chapter/story stands alone, so the book can be picked up and put down at the readers convenience.

Each story is beautifully told with wonderful descriptions which take the reader right into its heart. I found myself transported into each setting with the characters, I could see exactly where they were and what they were doing. This is writing at its best and there was nothing that could be predicted as each story had a subtle twist at the end.

If, like me, you haven't been big on short stories then I believe this may change your mind. Highly recommended.

Yvann S says

"May your brief candle shine brightly."

This collection of short stories follows an antique Breitling watch around England as it passes from unlucky owner to unlucky owner through mistaken gifts, payments in lieu and antique shops.

It really reminded me of Roald Dahl's short stories; all of the stories end with something bad for the Everyman who behaves badly in a specific way. Financial loss for the greedy man, a ruined present for the jealous man. It's extremely clever and well-constructed, the endings for each story are completely appropriate for the bad behaviour within, I just couldn't take the dread any more! It was like watching a car crash in slow motion, every 25 pages.

What is very well done is the character development - Wood only has about 20 pages with each character to set them up for their fall. I noticed that most of the characters were pretty similar - all men around the 40-year-old mark. I wonder if that was an intentional study of the age (like *The Sense of an Ending*), or whether the author found that an easy age group to write a generic person with one specific tragic flaw.

The writing is clear and clever without being obtrusive. Everything is in third person non-omniscient (my technical term for when the reader only knows what the character knows, and there is lots of internal monologue) which takes a certain level of commitment. The settings were generally irrelevant although primarily London-based, and perfectly fine - the short story format permits lots of travelling around without any need to develop one place very much.

I'm not at all suggesting this is badly written or not worth reading - a reader less prone to worrying than myself would almost definitely enjoy it.

Teresa says

Once Upon a Timepiece is an extremely impressive debut. It's a collection of 12 inter-connected short stories with the common theme being the timepiece of the title, a 1946 Breitling Chronomat made from rose-coloured gold. Starting with January, this novella takes place over the course of one year with each month dedicated to a different story as the watch passes through the hands of 12 different owners.

I am not a big fan of short stories - one or two stories inevitably stand out for me but these are usually spoiled by my dislike of the weaker tales. This collection succeeded where others failed as I was gripped by the whole concept as well as each integral part. The author cleverly interlinks each story with the same precision one might imagine the craftsman addressed to the making of the Breitling Chronmat. The characters of each story are strangers to each other but they share the same fragility that all humanity has, at the mercy of time. Greed, regret, ambition, envy, lust are all here with their full ugliness exposed in this thought-provoking read.

At times I was reminded of Roald Dahl's wonderful Tales of the Unexpected and W. W. Jacobs' classic horror story The Monkey's Paw - equally gripping reads! This would make a great gift, especially for anyone

suffering reader's block or those unfortunate folk who don't read very much...or indeed anyone... Wondering what the imaginative Starr Wood will come up with next.

Once Upon a Time was published by Bo Tree Books in November 2013. It's a short but extremely satisfying read at 178 pages.

Liz Barnsley says

Thank you to the author and publisher for the review copy.

A series of 12 short stories, all linked by a 1946 Breitling Chronomat wristwatch, this was a beautiful little read. I am a fan of short stories although these days it is hard to find great ones - in this case I thought they were almost perfect, linked as they were so although each one is an entity in and of itself, overall it has the "novel" feel.

Creatively speaking this is a stunning piece of work - each tale holds you in its thrall, often unexpected, always having a high level of characterisation, each one draws you in subtley but surely. Each linked in fascinating ways and with great effect, this was a terrific reading experience.

I read one each day and that worked for me really well - giving time to absorb one before starting on another. Overall Highly Recommended.

Happy Reading Folks!

Jo Barton says

The twelve short stories which appear in Once upon a Timepiece each represent a month of the year, which on the surface should have absolutely nothing in common, and yet as you approach the month of February, you realise that there is indeed a very clever link, and the connection is a rather expensive 1946 Breitling Chronomat wristwatch.

Using the wristwatch as its focus, each of the stories demonstrates both the very best and the very worst of society; there's greed, corruption, lust and deceit, and even as the worst sins of society are illustrated, you start to realise that when faced with a moral dilemma, each of us, almost without thinking, reverts to a lowest common denominator, namely self- preservation.

Beautifully crafted and with great skill the author manipulates each of the stories with a subtle hand, and although it may take you a little while to put together the connection, when the 'penny dropping' moment arrives, there is no mistaking the bond which links the story to its predecessor.

I'm really excited about this book. I am sure that it is one of those that will succeed by word of mouth , as once the book is finished there is an overwhelming need to pass the book on to someone else, so that the continuity of time passing remains a link to be cherished.

Highly Recommended.

Lieke says

I had the pleasure of winning this book in a goodreads giveaway, so I thought I'd give reviewing it a try. When I started reading this book, after the first couple of chapters I got the feeling the way the story was told was a bit forced, because you get a new story every month. But after reading it for a while I didn't really mind anymore.

The stories themselves were fun to read and often included a quite genius plot-twist near the end. The characters and stories were different and very original every time and the book was fun and quick to read, very enjoyable if you're looking for something light to read.

Anne says

The timepiece of the title is a Breitling Chronomat watch, made in 1946 and beautifully crafted from rose gold - elegant and expensive, and is the connecting link between each of the twelve short stories that make up this clever and thought-provoking book.

I certainly didn't expect to love this book as much as I did. Short stories can often be a big disappointment, I often think that they are either rushed or just have something missing. But not these, this is a collection of twelve very cleverly written, entertaining tales that deliver a massive punch with every end sentence.

The twelve stories are named after the months of the year. In January we meet Conrad Sands who has been the owner of the watch for twenty years. He's decided that it is time to return the watch to an old flame whose memory has haunted him, and this is the beginning of the watch's journey. The watch comes into the possession of people from all walks of life, all nationalities and each of them come by it in a different way.

Tricksters, thieves, rich, poor - the watch has a selection of owners, and each of them have their own story to tell.

Human nature is foremost in these stories that explore feelings and memories, regret and weakness and triumph and pride - almost every human trait is explored with writing that is almost perfect, and characters that are so well developed using so few words.

Once Upon a Timepiece is a real triumph for this young author, it is so difficult to believe that this is his debut, and I can't wait to read whatever he is dreaming up next.

Ali says

Received from the publisher Bo Tree books for review.

So what does make a novel a novel? I have seen this question debated time and again. Once Upon a Timepiece is described as a novel – and yet it is actually a book of twelve linked short stories, but if the

author thinks of it as a novel, then it's a novel isn't it? The book certainly benefits from being read like a novel – rather than being set aside between stories. Each chapter, which tells a new story, is named after a month of the year – chapter one is January and so on, and so begins the continuing theme of time.

“Occasionally he's hear a piece of music and be transported back twenty years to a different era, to a different version of himself, a younger version, a better version. It might be Lou Reed's 'Sweet Jane' or Blue Cheer's 'The Pilot' or any number of other songs. More and more, these tunes took him back to a place that increasingly looked nothing like his life today. They unlocked a time of possibility, a place without borders, a world of potential and greatness and passion. It wasn't only music, it was also books and art and conversations. More and more they filled him with a sense of a past vision for his life, a hope, and expectation that he had failed to achieve. Conrad was filled with a sense that, if his younger self could see him now, he would have been disappointed”

In January 2012 Conrad Sands sets out to return an expensive wristwatch to an old flame 20 years after it was entrusted to him. This sets off an extraordinary chain of events – as the antique watch passes from stranger to stranger over the next year. Each of these people linked invisibly by an object that touches and influences the lives it passes through. The watch; a rose-gold 1946 Breitling, in a sense becomes the central character of this book, whether you decide it's a novel or a collection of short stories I'm not sure is that important.

When Conrad's mission doesn't go quite to plan, the watch changes hands, as it does each month for the next year. The watch influences the life and fortunes of a reverend's apprentice – in my favourite chapter, helps to teach valuable lessons to a journalist, a business woman and a miserly husband. The watch passes through the hands of a self-made man, a gold digger, a dull university professor; it aids an overdue love affair, uncovers deceit and punishes greed.

As each story/chapter is read – each story could easily stand-alone – there are definite echoes of the Breitling's past and future owners. Each chapter ends with a delicious little twist – beautifully constructed – though one or two I did rather see coming. The whole does come together really well, as the book concludes there is an excellent sense of time passing, time carrying on, the continuity of time and things coming together again in full circle. I had worried that the book would feel contrived – there were one or two small moments perhaps – but on the whole – the links are superbly done, and I love the idea of strangers connected by an object.

Starr Wood is a British journalist, writer and economist who has lived in a lot of different parts of the world, he currently lives in Singapore. 'Once Upon a Timepiece' is his debut novel.

Merel says

Als eerste wil ik Goodreads bedanken voor het winnen van dit boek. Ik had niet verwacht dat ik zou winnen en ik was dan ook spontaan verrast dat ik een pakketje uit Singapore kreeg waar het boek 'Once Upon a Timepiece' in zat. Ik was helemaal blij :)

Once Upon a Timepiece gaat over een horloge. Conrad Sands krijgt het als cadeau van zijn vriendin toenertijd. Zij ging terug naar haar geboorteland. Twintig jaar later, en als Conrad inmiddels veertig is, krijgt hij weer contact met Mariana Carson. Als het puntje bij paaltje komt durft hij haar toch niet te ontmoeten. Hij heeft nooit echt iets van zijn leven gemaakt en in de bar zit een mooie en succesvolle vrouw.

Hij stuurt de ober van het restaurant met een briefje en het horloge naar de vrouw toe. Maar de vrouw blijkt Mariana niet te zijn, Mariana komt later pas. Maar de vrouw neemt het horloge gewoon mee naar huis. Nadat de vrouw het horloge heeft meegenomen komt het horloge op een wonderbaarlijke manier steeds bij iemand anders. Bij een journalist, een oud Cambridge student, een nanny etc.

Het boek had mij zeer verrast. Het waren 12 losse verhalen maar er zat een rode draad in de hoofdstukken. En iedere keer, ik zeg je IEDERE keer, kreeg Starr Wood het voor elkaar om me weer te verassen. Ik had ook wel verwacht dat ik veel te nieuwsgierig werd na hoe de levens van de personage in elk hoofdstuk verder gingen maar na elk hoofdstuk voelde ik een rust. Dat heb ik vaak niet bij bijvoorbeeld boeken met een open einde. Dan wil ik weten wat er gebeurd. Maar meneer Wood gaf we steeds het gevoel dat ze er wel uit zouden komen en dat hun problemen werden opgelost.

Een ander positief punt was dat het Engels heerlijk te behappen was. Als je Engels leesvaardigheid nog niet dermate hoog is is dit boek ook leuk om te lezen.

Wat ik wel jammer vind, maar dat is gewoon het ding met korte verhalen, dat de personage maar beperkt uitgewerkt waren. Starr heeft dat nog knap gedaan in het beperkt aantal bladzijden voor elk personage, maar ik zie ze toch graag meer uitgewerkt. Maar zoals ik al zei, dat is gewoon een ding met korte verhalen.

Ik wil het aan iedereen aanraden die niet zo van korte verhalen houdt(en degene die dat wel doen natuurlijk!) Want het geeft je een andere kijk en het is weer een ander type boek.

Kate says

Usually with collections of short stories, I only like one or two, and I rarely finish the entire book. However, I tore through this book and loved every second of it. Even though each chapter is a different short story, they are all part of a bigger whole and interconnected in multiple ways that surprised me. I also liked that each chapter had a nice twist to it, and held different themes and characters with different faults and voices. I received this as a First Read, and I had never heard of this author before, but after reading this novel, I can't wait to read more in the future.

Tracy Terry says

Though not usually a fan of the short story every now and then a collection will capture my imagination. This is one collection that did so in a huge way.

A collection of twelve short stories all of which are connected by the obtaining of an antique watch. Once Upon A Timepiece is a cleverly, very cleverly, constructed book that with a twist-in-the-tale to every story never fails to surprise.

Fun, quirky and with a lesson, however subtle, to be had each time the watch comes into the hands of a new character. I don't want to say too much about the overall plot or indeed the individual tales in the hope that every reader will feel the delight I did on discovering the various twists and turns of this wonderfully captivating little book.

Disclaimer: Read and reviewed on behalf of the agent for the author, I was merely asked for my honest opinion, no financial compensation was asked for nor given.

Anne says

I'm not much of a fan of short stories. I always find them a bit ephemeral, never enough depth or character development, a running out of steam leaving you wanting more. If you feel as I do, this is a book that just might make you change your mind. Although billed as "a novel", it's essentially twelve short stories, each representing a month of the year, all linked by a 1946 Breitling Chronomat wristwatch.

The whole collection is beautifully crafted, each story capable of standing alone, the stories strong, and all the characters vividly drawn and full of unexpected twists and turns, and the most ingenious conclusions. When you say something is "clever" it reads as a negative, but not in this instance – all the stories are beautifully written, and the creative imagination they demonstrate sometimes takes your breath away.

I absolutely loved this book. I read and reviewed it as a result of a direct approach from Ginny at Bo Tree Books, and I can thoroughly understand why the publishers have taken this approach to promotion. It's a book you want to tell people about, to pass on, to use as an example of how good the art of the short story can be.

Carole says

Once Upon A Timepiece is 176 pages of pure pleasure.

Each chapter is set in a different month of the year, starting in January when Conrad Sands attempts to return a wristwatch: a 1946 Breitling Chronomat made from rose-coloured gold: to his ex-girlfriend but things don't go according to plan and from then on the watch manages to belong to a different person each month.

Each story is unique, some are funny, some have little twists, some are thought-provoking, some are a little sad but all have moral questions. The chapters are only short, but Starr Wood manages to cram so much detail into them that the characters seemed so real. Excellent story-telling.

What I enjoyed most were the novel and unusual ways that the watch changed hands, from a mistake to a set up to an accident and so on.

A delightfully entertaining book.

From Carole's Book Corner

I received a copy of this book from the publishers in exchange for an honest review.

Jennine G. (Living On Purpose) says

Source: I received a copy of this book from the author in exchange for my honest review.

Once Upon a Timepiece, by Starr Wood chronicles the journey of a 1940s watch, that in the present day is extremely valuable and desirable. The watch's journey begins with a case of mistaken identity. At age 21, Conrad Sands' girlfriend of sorts, Mariana, gave him her grandfather's watch and soon after they went their own ways (by her choice) and hadn't been in contact since (also her choice). Now, twenty years later, they are reconnecting and Conrad wants to return the watch in the process. But when he enters the bar and sees a beautiful and accomplished looking woman sitting with her coat on the stool next to her, he knows he cannot measure up to all she appears to be. He leaves the watch and a note with the waiter to give her. As the woman is considering the watch, another woman with grey hair and an aged and accident damaged face enters the bar, asking if a man happened to be waiting for someone, mentioning that his name would be Conrad and hers is Mariana. The beautiful woman says she hopes Mariana isn't being stood up and leaves the bar still wondering who sent her the watch. It's a case of mistaken identity (or Conrad's assumption - you know what they say about assuming right?) that sends the watch on a crazy journey during the next year.

The next eleven chapters of the book - one for each month of the year - find the watch being lost, left behind, stolen, sold, etc. Each chapter begins with the watch in the hands of a new person and ends with the watch leaving that person in a twist of fate...and so the chapters connect as the watch travels. It journeys through people from all walks of life, involved in all sorts of life situations. Every time the watch seems to quietly reveal something about a person or situation in which it is present.

After passing through a banker, journalist, accountant, manager, mother, maid, entrepreneur, reverend's apprentice, professor, art collector, and a jack of all trades, the watch finally comes full circle, back to Conrad and Mariana. What I liked about this book is that although the chapters are all connected through the watch's presence, they can be read like individual short stories. Each chapter has a twist ending, which I soon caught onto and began trying to guess how any given situation would play out. Once Upon a Timepiece is not a long or difficult read, simply enjoyable. Not only am I a sucker for a twist ending (and technically this book gives you 11 twist endings), but also because I like to see the connectedness of things that we may never know about.
