

THE  
BEGINNER'S  
GOODBYE

A NOVEL



ANNE  
TYLER

**The Beginner's Goodbye**

*Anne Tyler*

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# The Beginner's Goodbye

*Anne Tyler*

## **The Beginner's Goodbye** Anne Tyler

Anne Tyler gives us a wise, haunting, and deeply moving new novel in which she explores how a middle-aged man, ripped apart by the death of his wife, is gradually restored by her frequent appearances—in their house, on the roadway, in the market.

Crippled in his right arm and leg, Aaron spent his childhood fending off a sister who wants to manage him. So when he meets Dorothy, a plain, outspoken, self-dependent young woman, she is like a breath of fresh air. Unhesitatingly he marries her, and they have a relatively happy, unremarkable marriage. But when a tree crashes into their house and Dorothy is killed, Aaron feels as though he has been erased forever. Only Dorothy's unexpected appearances from the dead help him to live in the moment and to find some peace.

Gradually he discovers, as he works in the family's vanity-publishing business, turning out titles that presume to guide beginners through the trials of life, that maybe for this beginner there is a way of saying goodbye.

A beautiful, subtle exploration of loss and recovery, pierced throughout with Anne Tyler's humor, wisdom, and always penetrating look at human foibles.

## **The Beginner's Goodbye Details**

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Author : Anne Tyler

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Genre : Contemporary

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# From Reader Review The Beginner's Goodbye for online ebook

## Sarah says

So, had I rated this book when I finished reading it (two weeks ago), it would have had two stars, maybe with a qualification that it should be a star and a half, but the rating system doesn't work that way. At the time I finished it, I was left feeling like the story was too sparse and disjointed, and too taken up with a character who I didn't really like hanging out with. The entire book felt that way, really- like I was sort of stuck on a bus with a long winded, hyper polite but hyper critical human being, just kind of hanging on until the end, when we could go our separate ways in peace, never to speak to each other again. The bus was crowded and kind of smelly and the view out the window was flat and filled with grey skies and bits of torn paper and signs for Burger King (which my companion would have had a lot to say about, all highly educated and snobbish and annoying, and I'd have found myself wanting a Whopper out of spite).

My companion on this journey- the protagonist of the story, Aaron Woolcott- was a recently widowed man who has been hanging out with the ghost of his dead wife. Or maybe a recently widowed man who finds the spirit of his beloved hangs just sort of shows up at random times and hangs out with him: it's probably not that accurate to portray Aaron as the initiator or active decision maker in these matters. And Aaron, you just know, is not the kind of person who, let's say, has a life trajectory of supernatural experiences happening to him. He's the co-owner of a vanity press shop built up by his father, a member of one of a fading but once prominent upper middle class family in the city of Baltimore, an atheist and a curdmugeon. He uses very precise language and is conscientious about his dress and has a mild stutter and a little bit of a limp, and if this totally polite, slightly snobby man sat down next to you and told you, mildly, apologetically even, that lately his dead wife had been visiting him and it was \*really weird\* the way his neighbors react, you, like me, would be hooked into that story. I guarantee you.

Aaron started his story by saying, straight up, it's been fascinating to see how people react to his dead wife standing next to him at the farmer's market or strolling down the street in front of their house, watching the construction crew replace the sunroof that was devastated when a hundred year old oak came crashing down on top of it, smiting everything (including his wife Dolores, who happened to have retreated to the sunporch seconds before it crashed down). Sometimes people act like she never died, or sometimes like they don't see her, or sometimes like maybe he is doing something crazy. You can't really ever tell or predict, he said, who will react what way. And of course I wanted to know- is this guy nuts or does he live in a world where maybe ghosts do come back and hang out with their loved ones- and I wanted to hear his whole story to figure it out. Which was it. Was this guy lying to me, was he crazy, or do the dead come from beyond?

So I sat down next to him and listened to his entire story: starting with how he was sick the day his wife died, and had come home early and laid on the couch, feeling miserable for himself, and how his secretary had followed him home and insisted on making him tea, which really infuriated him because (if you go on this voyage with him, you'll learn right here) despite the fact that he's got some significant physical limitations (and because of the fact, maybe, that his mom and older sister have made such a big deal of protecting him from the world), this is a man who absolutely despises having anyone help him. Even when he has the flu and someone makes him a cup of tea. (And, fair enough, I'd be a little weirded out if a coworker followed me home, uninvited, and just started making tea for me. Boundaries, folks!)

And he'll tell you about meeting Dolores, of course, and how much he admired her for her self-sufficiency and her utter lack of maternal instinct, how much she didn't want to take care of him (which was a huge part of the attraction for him, except for when he wanted her to take care of him and was hurt by her lack of

desire to, which, it turns out, was like every single second of their relationship), and how they married after dating for three months and how awkward they looked in their wedding photos.

And he'll tell you about his mom and his sister and the troop of people in his life who never leave him alone, which is all he ever wants, and then he'll tell you about when the people in his life do start to leave him alone, how totally horrible that is.

And about how, when his wife comes back to him, they get into fights! How absurd, right, he'll say? He'll just start yelling at her because he can't believe that she came back \*just\* to make him mad.

About at this point, I realized that I had zero interest in Aaron and hoped his deceased wife could just move on and find a nice friendly vampire or something, because with Aaron it is just touchy feelings and complaints and who needs that? Not even a dead woman. And this point came about 1/3 way into the novel, so I knew it would be a long, long haul. But I buckled down, and stayed present, and heard about how things played out for his sister and the nice building contractor, and about the secretary with the fluffy outfits that no one takes seriously, and about the ongoing weird conversation between Aaron and either his a) dead wife or b) guilty self. And I read to the end, which, I felt, involved a writing device which I'm not that fond of (let's skip ahead 5 years and not explain anything about how we got to this magical new place!) and never found out whether Aaron was delusional or just amazingly fortunate to get that last little bit of his wife back for awhile, which didn't even matter to me, because I had stopped caring.

I returned the book to the library, and thought that was that.

But weirdly, these past two weeks, I find Aaron's story growing on me. I'll be doing something (dishes, say, which I hate and feel totally grumpy about) and think of Aaron's description of the back of his wife's hands, which are soft and smooth despite how plump they are, and which he misses so much it brings him to tears. Or I'll be on the elevator, late to work, irritated with the way someone seems to want to get off at every single stop (I work on the 51st floor), and I'll remember Aaron's utterly awkward attempt to thank his secretary for making him oatmeal cookies, which he enjoyed tremendously but which he describes as "the cookies with things like rocks in them?" (that doesn't go over that well as a complement, which baffles him) and I find myself chuckling.

So maybe, now, I am haunted a little bit by Aaron. And maybe I find myself regretting that during our time together I was so critical and ornery, and didn't really give him the space to be a vulnerable and imperfect soul with me, just as he found himself regretting all the ways he never opened up to Dolores, and never allowed her to open up to him.

So, despite what I felt like were some problems with this novel, I have to give credit for something that lingers on and takes up a solid shape, long after you've said goodbye.

But, weirdly, in the space of two weeks, I've found myself going back again and again to

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**Helene Jeppesen says**

As can be seen from my rating, this book was my least favourite of Anne Tyler's so far. Not because it was necessarily bad, but because it was the one that affected me the least. It deals with Aaron's loss of his wife and how he deals with his loss, and I think that if I had just lost someone myself, this novel could act as a kind of catharsis for me. But as that is not the case (luckily!), I merely felt like this was a long story about Aaron's thoughts, hopes and doubts and I wasn't much into it.

I did appreciate the ending, though, which provided me with a beautiful wrapping up of Aaron's story. Still, the ending wasn't enough to make me like this book more than just a little bit.

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## **Jill says**

Some authors are comfort authors; we return to them again and again for their piercing insights and penetrating looks at what it means to be human. And so it is with me and Anne Tyler. Through books such as *Breathing Lessons* and *Ladder of Years*, I have fallen in love with her quirky characters and their well-meaning efforts to muddle through their lives and reach some sort of transcendence.

*The Beginner's Goodbye* is a wonderful addition to her works. It's deceptively simple: a 30-something man named Aaron is mildly disabled and is clucked over by his well-meaning and overbearing older sister. He eventually meets and marries an outspoken and plain doctor named Dorothy. When she dies (and we know she dies from page one), he is thrust into the unfamiliar world of grieving and lives primarily for the glimpses he catches of Dorothy...glimpses that he believes are authentic. The title is derived from the series that his publishing house prints – the “Beginner's Series.”

There is a poignancy to this story that from time to time, brought tears to my eyes. For instance, here is Aaron's exploration of grief: “It's like the grief has been covered over with some kind of blanket. It's still there, but the sharpest edges are...muffled sort of. Then, every now and then, I lift a corner of the blanket, just to check, and – whoa! Like a knife!”

Like Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, the tone is consistently gentle and compassionate. Has Dorothy really come back to complete their unfinished business together...or not? Take this passage: “Call to mind a person you've lost that you will miss to the end of your days, and then imagine happening upon that person out in public. You see your long-dead father sauntering ahead with his hands in his pocket. Or you hear your mother behind you calling, “Honey?”...You wouldn't question your sanity, because you couldn't bear to think this wasn't real... You would hold your breath. You would keep as still as possible. You would will your loved one not to go away again.”

Anne Tyler fans can expect whimsical and likeable secondary characters, and there are many of them in this novel: his sister Nandina, the contractor, Gil, and a host of well-meaning friends and acquaintances that rarely get it right. This book is about our shared human experience of loss, grief and recovery and the dynamics of a not always perfect marriage. It touched me deeply.

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## **Deb (Readerbuzz) Nance says**

I almost decided I didn't want to finish it. I agreed to be part of a bookray for this book. I was a fourth of the way into the story and I wasn't interested at all. I didn't care about the characters, I realized; I'll just close the

book and send the book on to the next reader.

Only there was no sending the book on. I was the last reader and the instructions specified that the last reader was to keep the book and pass it on as she wished.

It just didn't seem respectful to pass on a book that I didn't like enough to finish. What to do? What to do?

So it was with great reluctance that I read on.

And I warmed to the story, slowly, slowly, with every page read starting to like the story more. As I read on, I could feel the Anne Tyler-ness of the story start to build, the loneliness of the characters, the quirkiness of the characters, and the way the characters finally were able to overcome their loneliness and quirkiness by finding other lonely, quirky people to love.

And, in the end, I liked it very much. A satisfying read. Not my favorite Anne Tyler, but a satisfying read.

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## **Gerald says**

Some fans complain this book is too short. So read it twice. Actually, that's not a facetious comment. The second time through, slow down. You needn't be at all concerned about what happens next. Marvel at Anne Tyler's spare style. And ask yourself why it's not the same as other authors who limit themselves to twenty-word sentences, no more than two clauses per. It should be plain-vanilla tenth-grade stuff. It should be boring and insipid. But there's something else going on here. Something gets said between the lines. It could baffle you trying to figure it out. I think it's all about logic and thought flow. Your brain has to supply what's skipped over. She trains you not only to read, but also to think and to feel. This main character is a jerk, easier to sympathize with because he has a disability. But he's using the disability as an excuse not to relate to people. "Don't give me any help" is his self-fulfilling proclamation. He justifies himself to himself, as we all do, even when he knows he's behaving selfishly.

I do believe that Anne Tyler and John Le Carre are two of the grander literary talents of the twentieth century. If you appreciate literary style for its own sake, you could pick no better mother and father.

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## **Sara says**

3.5, rounded up.

Signature Anne Tyler. She knows how to get to the heart of a person in the first five pages and make you truly care about the everyday minutia of his life. I cannot ever remember reading an Anne Tyler that I didn't like. This was no exception.

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## Karen says

Anne Tyler has been one of my favorite authors, but for some reason, her last few books just haven't drawn me in too much. This one in particular seems a little weak to me. I suspect I should feel some sort of sympathy for Aaron, the main character, who has lost his wife Dorothy in an unlikely accident, and in the process of grieving is learning more about himself, more about love, and more about being in relationships with others. But instead, I feel sorry for Dorothy, who had to be married to a man who is a bit of a jerk and, it seems, never really appreciated all she did and could offer to him in love. The fact that he remarries and has a child at the end seems a little annoying to me. He strikes me as a bit selfish; a man who first seemed to push people away in efforts to prove his independence (despite a disability), now decided to marry someone who seems like the ultimate old-fashioned wife who will take care of his every need. A good quick read, but not what I would consider her best characters.

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## Cynthia says

Grief Primer?

Tyler is one of my favorite writers and has been for some time. "The Beginner's Goodbye" is probably her shortest novel but it packs a wallop. It's about almost middle aged Aaron who's recently lost his wife in an out of the blue accident. Of course Aaron misses her terribly so you can imagine how comforted he feels when he begins running into her at odd times. Every now and then others seem to see her too! He doesn't mention this to his sister, who is also his business partner in a small publishing firm, because she's already nagging him to come live with her. She worries about him being on his own with his grief. He doesn't want to live with her mostly because he feels closer to his wife in their own house. He doesn't want to say goodbye to his wife and the life they've had together.

Aaron begins to cautiously ask others if they've ever had encounters with passed loved ones and if so what they think their loved one came back to say. Though his wife Dorothy's visits are short they provide almost a form of marriage counseling for issues the couple had in their marriage. Mostly though the visits bring comfort. Gradually Aaron does find some peace and even begins to look toward the future. Though the subject of grief is terribly sad this is not a dark book. It has humor and insights but mostly it has love. Oh, and since this is Tyler, it has quirky characters.

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## Katerina says

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## Ryan Field says

Unless you've actually experienced a horrific event in your life that is so shocking it not only defines your

past but also your future, it might be difficult to grasp the magnitude of *The Beginner's Goodbye*. In other words, that one day in your life...or maybe even minute...that defines everything about you and tests you, where there was your life before the event and then your life after the event. People who have experienced these sudden losses, so strange by nature they never could have been predicted, will know what I'm talking about. You're never the same again.

In this book it's the sudden loss of a spouse, in a relationship that was far from perfect and yet it worked for both husband and wife. And this sudden, unpredictable loss leaves Aaron not only in shock, but also going through all the stages of grief, from blame to acceptance. One minute he's living his normal ordinary life and the next he's living someone else's life and he's not sure how to start over. But more than that, he's not ready to let go of his wife either. There's so much left unsaid and so many things he wished he'd done he begins to run into his dead wife in the most unlikely places...or at least he thinks he does.

The intricate relationship between Aaron and his wife before her death is examined closely, and those who know and understand what being married for the long haul is all about...the compromises and frustrations and the little things taken for granted...will laugh and cry at various stages of this book. Even the reaction Aaron has to his own home is depicted in such detail, and it's so real, people who have lost their spouses will be amazed something like this could have been written so well. One day he's enjoying the less than perfect aspects of his home and the next he can't even stand to look at it from the curb.

As the story progresses, Aaron slowly moves forward toward his new life, by stumbling and tripping (literally and figuratively) with each step he takes. This is the new life he never imaged he would have. He does this in his own quiet way, by remembering little details about his dead wife's flaws and attributes. He examines his marriage all the way back to the moment he met his dead wife. And by doing this he not only learns more about his dead wife and his marriage, but he also learns a few things about himself he didn't see while he was married. At times it's funny; at times it's painful. For those who have experienced trauma like Aaron's experienced, at times it's even difficult to read.

I'm not going to give out any spoilers in this review because that would ruin it for all the people who will understand where Ms. Tyler was going with this book, and who will relate to Aaron. The writing is solid and tight, without overwritten sentences or poor dialogue tags. There's no unnecessary dialogue to slow down the pace. What's there moves the story and the characters forward with each sentence. And the only down side to reading a book like this by Anne Tyler is that now I'll have to wait at least another two years for her next novel.

My one suggestion would be to advise readers not to read the book description by the publisher. It does contain a spoiler I thought was intricate to the story, and had I read it before I started the book I would have missed out on one huge surprise in the book. I don't know who wrote this book description, but he/she clearly doesn't know how to write book descriptions very well.

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## **Tequila says**

I liked the concept of the book; however when I actually started reading the book I was disappointed. The novel was too slow paced and uneventful for me to enjoy. I should have spent time watching paint dry instead of reading this book to the end. I recommend this book to readers who like enjoy reading books such as the dictionary or any other book that is pretty boring to read...



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## **Teresa says**

### **3 and 1/2 stars**

Anne Tyler is, of course, great at characters, but she's also great at endings, even when you've guessed what's probably coming. It's not that the ending is predictable, but that you've spotted the clues before the main character does so. You would've missed them too, if you were him. Aaron sees but doesn't perceive, then he does perceive but doesn't see, and then he has to do it all over again. But in doing it again, you know more, and also know that this time it should, at least theoretically, be easier.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book while I was reading it. I loved Aaron's prickliness, though that's probably because he's prickly about some of the same things I am.

Those who are already Tyler fans will probably like this novel more than those who haven't read anything else by her yet. Aaron's job, editing a series of books for 'beginners,' reminded me of Macon's writing travel guidebooks in Tyler's "The Accidental Tourist." Both men have experienced a tragic loss (not a spoiler, it's stated at the beginning of both) and both have sisters who are forces in their lives. A minor character here shows up from another Tyler book, and though it's not a big deal as far as the plot goes, I thought it was fun.

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## **♥ Sandi ♥ says**

From the woman who brings characters and the everyday alive, comes a disabled man who loses his wife to a terrible accident - a falling tree. As we wind our way through the story about Aaron and Dorothy we are shown the most intimate parts of their marriage. But it is only through her death that Aaron is able to really understand and appreciate Dorothy. Through his grief Aaron believes that Dorothy comes back to talk with him.

Anne Tyler is the most amazing author of the everyday life that I have ever read. Her books are not twisting plots, deep agonizing mysteries, or the unbelievable. She sculpts her characters to perfection, plots her novels to every day realistic happenstance and writes in a simple heartfelt prose. You feel this could be you, or your family, or your neighbor, that you are reading about. Each story she writes brings human emotion. Raw emotion, the emotions we are apt to face in any given day. Her character development is superb. The person that you may not like at the beginning of the story is the one you most like at the end. Anne Tyler keeps me earthbound, through her wonderful knack of bringing everyday into focus.

I also found Kirby Heyborne to be a very good narrator.

3.5 stars

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## **Greta says**

Anne Tyler has been consistently one of my favorite authors most of my adult life, so I was pretty disappointed with this last book of hers. The book gets its title from the series of books the main character's vanity press publishing firm puts out, fluff instruction books which never get to the actual meat of what needs to be learned. Hmmm...a quirky man working on quirky books which ignore the reality of life...where have I seen that theme before? The Accidental Tourist! And that's not the only similarity. The main male

character in both books is grieving the death of someone close to them, which is the central theme of both books. The men are both anti-social and needed a new woman to pry them out of their loneliness. However, the difference is that *The Accidental Tourist* is hilarious, warm, off-beat, and best of all, the other main character is alive! In *The Beginner's Goodbye* the dead wife of the quirky guy is the other main character. She appears to him throughout the whole book and it is never clear whether we should suspend disbelief or not. Is she real? Is she a figment of his imagination? Not clear. I went with the suspension of disbelief in hopes that this would resolve later on, and it did sort of, no thanks to the characters, who were both really flaccid people...nothing to make them very lovable even to each other. So the wrap up reminded me of an airliner's descent. Not subtle. I knew where the story was headed: straight for the ending. At 15,000 ft. Aaron moves back into the house. At 10,000 ft. there's the foreshadowing of Aaron's future as seen in the sprinkler droplets, at 5,000 feet Aaron and Dorothy get everything all wrapped up. At 2,500 ft. he has a daughter (is he still young enough to do that..it feels like he's 60 or so). It's 1,000 ft. --time to find out who his new wife is. It's all too forced and not congruent with what had gone on before. One last note, 4 year old twins giving up a chance to play in a stream so they could watch a couple guys playing baseball!! Talk about suspension of disbelief!!

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## **Darlene says**

I have read many of Anne Tyler's books and I always love the characters she creates. The characters in this book, *The Beginner's Goodbye*, were no exception. Socially awkward, often rigid in their routines and ways of thinking and unable to communicate with each other, Aaron Woolcott and Dr. Dorothy Rosales, husband and wife and the main characters in this story, were often exasperating, sometimes sympathetic and ultimately endearing, very human characters.

This book starts off with a typical day in Aaron and Dorothy's lives but by the end of that typical day, everything has changed... Dorothy is fatally injured by a freak accident and Aaron is left alone.... shell shocked, bewildered and utterly dismayed. This story is about Aaron's journey through the maze of emotions which make up his grief and loneliness. And the story is that much more poignant because of the way Aaron IS so rigid that he cannot bring himself to accept the help and caring generously offered by his friends, co-workers and neighbors. Aaron is stuck.... he can't return to his life as it was but he can't seem to move on. In every way he can think of, he tries to get back into his life. Particularly heartbreaking to me was when he tries thinking about all of the ways his life with Dorothy irritated him..."the trail of crumpled tissues and empty coffee mugs she left in her wake, her disregard for the finer points of domestic order and comfort.... I was hoping they would annoy me still, so that I could stop missing her."

Aaron's salvation ultimately comes in an unexpected form... Dorothy, herself. Dorothy begins appearing to Aaron and he feels comfort that he has been searching for in her presence. They finally begin to have those conversations they should have had but never did... neither had wanted to upset the 'tranquility' of their home life. And amazingly, Aaron finds that he is gradually starting to enjoy all of the little things again... caring for his yard, cooking in his kitchen, racquetball with his friend. He is finally ready to join the living again.

I suppose it's up to the reader to decide if Aaron really DOES see Dorothy again and whether they DO learn to talk to each other about all of the things they were not able to give each other emotionally while Dorothy was alive... or maybe these conversations only occurred in Aaron's mind. For me,...well, I would like to believe that anything is possible and that we, as people, find what we need, when we need it.

'*The Beginner's Goodbye*' was a beautiful story of one man's journey through loss and grief and his discovery

of how to say goodbye.

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## Glenn Sumi says

### **DON'T JUDGE THIS BOOK BY ITS COVERS** (review is below):

What's up with the covers for Anne Tyler's *The Beginner's Goodbye*? On the front of my edition, there's a gently lit photo of a slim young woman wearing a soft white blouse reading a book on a bed. It has **ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THIS NOVEL**. I don't know who this woman could be. She's certainly not Dorothy, who's described as short, stocky and Latina. She's not Aaron's sister, Nandina. Is she supposed to be the book's ideal reader? Oh wait, I know what she is! She's a chicklit marketing strategy!

This next cover image, I think from the UK edition, is a lot more appropriate. It features a photo of an empty rocking chair (presumably for the deceased Dorothy) on a deserted porch, with shadows that make it seem like tragedy has struck. It's mournful yet lyrical, quietly domestic. And there's something almost spiritual about it. Quite fitting.

This next cover image isn't as powerful, but plants do crop up in the book, and I guess they also suggest a funeral? (Hey, I'm reaching here...)

I'm not sure what to make of this next cover image, which I suppose contrasts modern life with a more genteel era. Again: it has nothing to do with this novel at all. And it certainly doesn't capture the tone of the book.

None of these covers, with the possible exception of the porch one, makes it seem like you'll have a grieving, 37-year-old, stuttering, cane-wielding man as your narrator. Okay. Rant over. Now to get to the review:

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### **REVIEW: *The Beginner's Goodbye* – a.k.a. *The Reader's Déjà Vu***

This book will be familiar to anyone who's read Anne Tyler's *The Accidental Tourist* or even seen the movie. After a tragedy occurs, a man – who incidentally also works in publishing – must come to terms with his grief and his sudden single status and, with the help of his friends and family, learn to embrace life again.

Tyler's writing is graceful and clear, but she occasionally seems to be going through the motions.

We've met some of these quirky characters before: the fussy, conservative man; the bossy sister; the gaudy, loud yet warm-hearted woman. But somehow they don't seem as vivid here. And what's really odd is that

Tyler's protagonist, the mildly disabled, stuttering Aaron, is supposed to be 37-years-old but seems like a man nearly twice that age. He talks about "courting" his wife, Dorothy – is that really a term a 37-year-old would use? And his relationship with Dorothy never clicked for me: a serious problem.

*But still...*

The book gains in emotional texture as it progresses. The theme of revisiting the past to understand the present is a very moving one. And I appreciate how Tyler, one of fiction's major realist writers, uses a touch of the supernatural to achieve her effects. The suspenseful way she structures the finale is pretty brilliant, too.

And while the novel calls to mind other Tyler books, it also draws on the haunting myth of Orpheus and Eurydice.

Here's one of the book's key passages, about grief and memory. Aaron is trying to understand why he keeps seeing his dead wife:

[Put] yourself in my place. Call to mind a person you've lost that you will miss to the end of your days, and then imagine happening upon that person out in public. You see your long-dead father sauntering ahead with his hands in his pockets. Or you hear your mother behind you calling, "Honey?" Or your little brother who fell through the ice the winter he was six, let's say, passes by with his smell of menthol cough drops and damp mittens. You wouldn't question your sanity, because you couldn't bear to think this wasn't real. And you certainly wouldn't demand explanations, or alert anybody nearby, or reach out to touch this person, not even if you'd been feeling that one touch was worth giving up everything for. You would hold your breath. You would keep as still as possible. You would will your loved one not to go away again.

Notice the details that help ground these people: the hands in pockets; the smell of cough drops and damp mittens. And I like the use of the imperative here; Aaron's speaking to us directly, persuasively. Tyler's husband passed away less than a decade before she wrote the book, but you can imagine her channeling her feelings in this passage to make the specific universal.

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## **Maxwell says**

Anne Tyler's writing is impeccable as always. But I felt like this story just lacked the emotional *oomph* that her stories usually have. It was quite short, but I don't think that is its major fault. For me it was hard to imagine Aaron, our narrator, as a 35-year-old man in mid 2000's Baltimore. He spoke like someone twice his age and it was difficult for me to separate Tyler's authorial voice from her character's in this instance. Overall this story just felt underdeveloped, and, while pleasant to read, left me with little to ponder.

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## **Lynne Spreen says**

After reading some of the reviews, I felt a bit off-kilter, as if I'm seeing something that wasn't intended by the author.

Nevertheless, here's my impression: this story is about a man who, because of his physical limitations, resists closeness with other people, to the point that he marries a woman who seems certain to want the same, arm's length relationship. It's only after she dies that he begins to sense that he was wrong about that. During the grieving process, he comes to realize he's been living an arm's-length life.

I love stories about people who come out of a fog and change their lives, empowered by the realization that they've been missing something important - that their reasoning was flawed, but it doesn't have to remain that way. And Anne Tyler is such a great wordsmith, anything she writes is wonderful. This book is perhaps a bit too subtle to win the raving applause it deserves.

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## **Fionnuala says**

Hmmm. Has anyone else noticed the obsession with clothing that runs through this book? The characters are all described in terms of what they wear and their choices of clothing tend to stand in sometimes for character development. Irene, admittedly a minor character, is always stylishly dressed, leafing through fashion magazines and rushing off to catch some sale at a clothing store. That is pretty much all we are told about her. Dorothy, one of the leading characters, is defined by her total disinterest in clothes to the extent that she fails to even change out of her work clothes for a first date. This inability to know how to dress for a date or even her own wedding becomes a lynchpin of the action, demonstrating her disconnection from the supposedly important things in life. Aaron's rather hapless character is underlined by his shabby clothes, with the wrong size collar or jacket sleeves which are too short. His sister's clothing is used to show how she also is a little out of step with the world. Finally, there is Peggy, whose main characteristic is that she dresses in frills and flounces to brighten up everyone else's life. Wouldn't it be nice if life were that simple...

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## **Tressa says**

"Anne could write about any city. She could never leave the house and write great fiction. She beautifully captures regular people who are not trying to be noticed. She writes about real life." —John Waters on his friend and fellow Baltimorean, Anne Tyler

Anne Tyler's new book, *The Beginner's Goodbye*, has all the ingredients of a successful Tyler book: quirky characters, family dysfunction, an introspective protagonist, a tragedy, a coping, and a rebirth. While I don't feel like this slim volume measures up to some of Tyler's greater works—*The Accidental Tourist*, *Saint Maybe*, *Back When We Were Grownups*, *The Amateur Marriage*, and my personal favorite, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*—it is well worth a read, as is any Tyler book.

Aaron Woolcott is 34 years old and runs his family's small publishing company. He is married to Dorothy, a practical, frumpy doctor eight years his senior whom he met when he sought a radiologist's expertise for his company's *Beginner's Guide* series on cancer. Aaron, who has been fussed over all his life by a doting mother and younger sister due to a crippled leg and arm resulting from a childhood disease, is smitten with

Dorothy's unfussy nature, and he knows that this is the type of woman he could share a life with. But, as in any Tyler book, life does not go according to plan.

Aaron and Dorothy are married twelve years when a tree falls onto the roof of their sun porch and knocks over a big screen TV, crushing Dorothy to death. Aaron moves in with his sister while his house is being repaired. Aaron is in no hurry to return to his empty house, and because the repairs to the house are major, he stays on at his sister's and reflects on the kind of marriage he and Dorothy had. Like any memories after a loss, the good ones rise to the top, at first, but eventually Aaron is reminded of all the ways their marriage didn't work. Aaron, tall and thin, and Dorothy, stumpy and wide, never quite fit together when they hugged, just as they didn't fit as a couple.

Uncharacteristic of a Tyler book, Dorothy starts appearing unannounced to Aaron a year after her death, popping up at his elbow as he's walking down the sidewalk, or staring at the house from across the street. Their talks are brief, but much is imparted. And unlike some apparitions with the charitable goal of coming back to comfort the living, the no-nonsense Dorothy simply needs some things clarified before saying goodbye forever.

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