



The Clouds in Memphis: Stories and Novellas (Grace Paley Prize in Short Fiction)

C. Hribal

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The late Raymond Carver wrote of *Matty's Heart*, C. J. Hribal's first book, "our literature is healthier, and wiser with the publication of this collection of short fiction." Commenting on the same volume, Anne Tyler wrote, "some of these pieces are real masterpieces." Now Hribal is back with a new collection that charts both the recesses of the human heart and the resiliency of the human spirit. In three novellas and two short stories, Hribal traces the arcs of emotion and action that can follow on the heels of calamity. In the title novella, a divorced woman whose oldest son is hit and killed by a reckless driver struggles to come to terms with both her grief and the wreckage of her life since her marriage ended. In "War Babies," the sister of a woman killed in what may or may not have been an industrial accident tries to imagine the circumstances leading up to her sister's death, believing that in knowledge there can be solace. A different tack is taken by the central character in "Consent," a real estate developer who has to deal with a drowning that occurs in his newest subdivision: his reconstruction of the event carries him into dangerous moral territory. But not all the territory here is dangerous. The novella "And That's the Name of That Tune" features a narrator who recalls his father's escapades in a bar when the son was his seven-year-old companion. Tender, compassionate, bewildered, the son strives to understand the havoc his father inflicts on his family. In a starred review, *Publishers Weekly* wrote that Hribal "establishes an American landscape in the tradition of Cheever and Updike, though his is a world not of cocktail parties but of trailer parks, bars, and courtrooms. The subtle power of these stories will leave the reader hungry for more."

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