

January 2021 Reading Challenge: Short story collection by an author from a marginalized community.

By Kristen Johnston

From personal experience, I find that short story collections are often overlooked when compared to lengthier works of fiction. People have told me that they believe short stories are for people with shorter attention spans, or people who don't care to get to *really* know a character. But, I would highly disagree.

Short story collections are the perfect way to engage in beautifully written fiction, get an in-depth insight into what makes someone tick, and have it all wrapped up within 30 pages. These small snapshots into a character's life can pack an unexpected punch. It's the purest example of a little bit going a long way.

The series of vignettes seamlessly strung together in a short story collection can help provide a greater understanding of the world, a group of people, or a moment in time. They can quickly absorb you into a fantasy world, and then take you right back to reality.

In this day and age, short stories are easily digestible and can provide you with a much-needed brief escape from your everyday life and the world around you.

HOW TO PRONOUNCE KNIFE - Souvankham Thammavongsa (AVAILABLE ON AUDIBLE)

This 2020 Scotiabank Giller Prize winner can introduce (or re-introduce) readers to the power and magic of a short story. This collection of stories focuses on characters struggling to make a living, illuminating their hopes, disappointments, love affairs, acts of defiance, and above all their pursuit of a place to belong. Thammavongsa paints an indelible portrait of watchful children, wounded men, and restless women caught between cultures, languages, and values.

WE TWO ALONE – Jack Wang

Set on five continents and spanning nearly a century, *We Two Alone* traces the long arc and evolution of the Chinese immigrant experience. From the vulnerable and disenfranchised to the educated and elite, the characters in this extraordinary collection embody the diversity of the diaspora at key moments in history and in contemporary times.

SHUT UP YOU'RE PRETTY - Téa Mutonji

In Mutonji's disarming debut story collection, punchy, sharply observed stories blur the lines between longing and choosing, exploring the narrator's experience as an involuntary one. Tinged with pathos and humour, they interrogate the moments in which femininity, womanness, and identity are not only questioned but also imposed.

MOCCASIN SQUARE GARDENS – Richard Van Camp

The characters of Moccasin Square Gardens inhabit Denendeh, the land of the people north of the sixtieth parallel. These stories are filled with in-laws, outlaws and common-laws. Van Camp's

collection is also haunted by the lurking presence of the Wheetago, human-devouring monsters of legend that have returned due to global warming and the greed of humanity. The stories in *Moccasin Square Gardens* show that medicine power always comes with a price.