

The Train Now Departing



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From Publishers Weekly As she did in *Hotel Paradise*, Grimes here eschews the mystery genre, venturing into Anita Brookner territory in two related novellas whose protagonists are lonely women in emotional limbo. The unnamed heroine of the title story is a colorless woman who lives on an inheritance in her comfortable family home in a small town, has given up her job as a teacher and spends her days in passive desperation. A chance meeting with a man who writes travel books leads to her only sustained human contact. The two have platonic late-afternoon lunches during which his attention to his food outweighs her need for conversation; when they do talk, they bicker. She only picks at the rich food, preferring cheese sandwiches at the railway cafe, where she feels more affinity for the waitress than she does for the writer, whom she inwardly assails as a man without depth. It is she herself, however, too

timid to travel anywhere, or to do anything at all, who is depthless. The irony of the denouement, where the woman's fear proves more accurate than the writer's offhand denial of danger, proves touching. Though she too represents another narrow existence lived in solitude, Edith Parenger, the protagonist of "When The Mousetrap Closes," is a more appealing, nuanced character. "An ordinary maiden lady" of 52, she is mourning the recent death of her mother, with whom she lived in harmony. When renowned young actor Archie Marchbanks turns up at her neighborhood tearoom, Edith is moved to talk to him. To her amazement, he initiates a weekly tea date during which she quizzes him about his craft. Clues to Archie's motivation emerge when he describes his roles as "the trick of the confidence man," but Edith is slow to understand the implications of his behavior. As Grimes describes these women with restrained sympathy, one is moved by her ability to suggest the aching emotional chasm of apparently solid middle-aged lives. Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal The latest offering from Grimes, the author of the popular Richard Jury mystery series, consists of a pair of atmospheric novellas. While both stories center on middle-aged, single women whose careful, well-ordered lives are gradually altered by meals they share with male acquaintances, these two novellas are quite distinct in their ambience and characterization. In "The Train Now Departing," Grimes eerily depicts a bright, analytical woman teetering into madness. "When the Mousetrap Closes" is the story of Edith Parenger, a woman whose desperate loneliness is pitted against her keen powers of observation in an unflinching exploration of the power of illusion. Although these stories are not mysteries, they are full of suspense and surprise. These carefully written little gems showcase Grimes at her best. Recommended for all fiction collections.---Jane La Plante, Minot State Univ Lib., ND Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc. See all Editorial Reviews

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