

## Mr. Simpson and Other Short Stories

**Stephen Maitland-Lewis**

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*The diverting short stories collected in Mr. Simpson and Other Short Stories concern money—both the lack of it, and what people are willing to do to get it.*

Flawed men and inscrutable women populate Stephen Maitland-Lewis's short story collection, *Mr. Simpson and Other Short Stories*.

Money is hard to come by, especially when you're rich, as Mr. Simpson and others learn the hard way. But with their futures, careers, honor, and even lives on the line, they are willing to do what is necessary to get the money they need. Some stay within the law; others dance outside of it, and with varying levels of eagerness and success. After all, money may not solve all problems, but it helps.

In addition to financial woes, these characters are haunted by dark secrets, unsatisfying careers, and love affairs gone wrong. Some pursue money as a way of solving their troubles, while others find that money is the beginning of their woes. Still, it is rare that money proves to be a cure-all; there is often a drawback, a sacrifice, or a soul-baring decision to be made. Often, the entries reach an emotional climax when their leads realize this, resulting in rewarding moments, as with the satisfying irony of "Hubris." Only the story "Every Employee's Dream" has no such personal moment of truth.

Several of the stories incorporate historical events into their tales, as with "Mr. Simpson," about the cash-strapped ex-husband of the notorious Wallis Simpson. And "Anyone for Tennis?" is an intriguing alternate history, in which a young reporter gets the scoop of a lifetime from a Russian spy turned American first lady. These elements approach familiar events from new, intimate perspectives, highlighting the small, unpredictable consequences of major occurrences. In the poignant but muddled "A Gardner in Buenos Aires," a Nazi hunter bonds with one of his prey's victims.

Elements of mystery arise in entries like "The Author," in which an elderly woman seeks to publish a hidden story; and an unexpected discovery sends a misanthrope on an obsessive mission of vengeance in "The Light Went Out." Such entries build suspense in the slow unraveling of their secrets, until there is no choice but to take a risk and hope for the best. Most of the stories are straightforward but enjoyable, approaching greed, desire, and lust from diverse perspectives to underline how much different people have in common.

Filled with intriguing adventures, the diverting short stories collected in *Mr. Simpson and Other Short Stories* concern money—both the lack of it, and what people are willing to do to get it.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (July 13, 2021)

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