



Two Short Stories

Ross M. Elliott

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Elliott expertly presents the tales of two ordinary men whose lives are disrupted by extraordinary events.

Two Short Stories by Ross M. Elliott consists of the tales “Four Trees” and “Promise of the Beam.” Each story centers on a moment in the life of the main character and juxtaposes the mundane with the extraordinary. Elliott skillfully builds suspense and mystery in these short tales.

In “Four Trees,” a writer working on a new story for his publisher stays at a cabin in the woods for a few days. While taking a walk in the forest to clear his mind, he happens upon a path that leads him to a beautiful clearing, where he feels so peaceful that he falls asleep. When he is unable to find the clearing again on subsequent trips in the woods, he enlists the help of two young women he met on his journey. Slowly becoming obsessed with the mystery, the man begins to have dreams and visions of a violent pagan ritual. At the end of the story, he realizes too late that things are not what they seem, and that his friends are not who they say they are.

In “Promise of the Beam,” a man who maintains a lighthouse for the Coast Guard feels a sense of purpose in the work he does keeping boaters safe. Although he goes to town occasionally for supplies, he lives a life of solitude. A number of years ago, he lost his wife and son when their boat crashed into the rock ledge. He uses alcohol to help him cope with the loss. When another boat crashes into the rock ledge, the man blames himself and grief overwhelms him.

Elliott’s use of descriptive language is effective. He provides insight into the daily lives of the characters and a glimpse into their settings (e.g., a beautiful path through the woods near a cabin, the rock ledge and water near a lighthouse, a dense fog, etc.). However, there are times when the story is overwhelmed by details, becoming mundane. For example, the protagonist of “Four Trees” is asleep during a significant amount of the tale, but it’s not obvious whether this increased sleep is part of the plot. The language of the stories is repetitive at times, which causes confusion as to how much time has passed. The narration of “Promise of the Beam” switches between first person and third person occasionally in the story.

In “Four Trees,” the author builds suspense by slowly unfolding a mystery, yet providing very few clues along the way. Overall, the story is engaging, and the ending is unexpected and satisfying. Suspense is also excellent in “Promise of the Beam.” The story has a slower pace than “Four Trees,” but the main character is clearly in a great deal of emotional pain. His background and experiences are revealed slowly as the story continues. The story ends with a sense of redemption.

In crafting a short story, the author has a limited space to develop characters, provide background, and keep things interesting. In *Two Short Stories*, Elliott expertly presents the tales of two ordinary men whose lives are disrupted by extraordinary events. In spite of a few minor syntactical errors, *Two Short Stories* is a pleasure to read and will appeal to fans of mystery or suspense novels.

GABRIE'L ATCHISON (March 24, 2015)

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