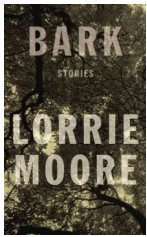


# Bark



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No one else does wry humorous stories full of punch the way Lorrie Moore does. In *Bark*, her newest collection, she examines modern life after divorce and the difficult art of parenting teens. In the opening story "Debarking" she describes the dating life of a newly divorced man, Ira Wilkins. He meets a zany pediatrician Zora at a dinner party, and they begin seeing each other. Unfortunately, this also involves contact with Zora's teenage son—the zip-lock mouthed, Bruno. Does it give Ira the willies that Bruno and Zora have an uncomfortable habit of sitting close and touching? Yep. Yet Ira plows on with a romance that is hardly reciprocated. His confidence is down so he allows Zora and Bruno to take advantage of him—he buys them meals, movie tickets, etc. They even take the rest of his birthday cake home after a lackluster celebration because Bruno needs it for his school lunch. This can't end well and it doesn't but what fun happens along the way.

More eerie is "The Juniper Tree" a kind of new age ghost story where three women share their talents: art, dance, song with their recently deceased friend who still haunts her house. The first person narrator never made it to the hospital to see the friend, Robin Ross, and in fact came to this odd séance with no prepared gift. So on the spot, she sang a rendition of the "Star Spangled Banner."

Lorrie Moore is adept at contemporary dialogue as seen in these lines from "Foes," "When Brocko was a kid. That sixties guy? But Brocko doesn't even like the sixties... The sixties took his mother on some wild ride away from him."

"Paper Losses" shows Kit and Rafe's marriage up close and personal as it tears apart. The family takes one last vacation together to a Mexican resort where Rafe tans his body for someone else. Speaking of her marriage to a friend, Kit says, "All husbands are space aliens." On the day Rafe served Kit divorced papers out of the blue, Kit shares her philosophy of life, "A woman had to choose her own particular unhappiness carefully. That was the only happiness in life: to choose the best unhappiness." Kit also describes divorce to be very similar to marriage, "a power grab, as in who would be the dog and who the owner of the dog."

Yes, these stories can be dark, but they are realistically dark and oddly funny in the particulars. Kate Atkinson also writes in a darkly humorous and witty way. Try her story collection *Not the End of the World*.

Posted by Dory L. on April 22, 2014

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# Bark : Stories »

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