



Cathedral: stories

By Raymond Carver

First published in 1983

Genre & subject

Short stories

Classic fiction

Synopsis

Raymond Carver said it was possible 'to write about commonplace things and objects using commonplace but precise language and endow these things - a chair, a window curtain, a fork, a stone, a woman's earring - with immense, even startling power'. Nowhere is this alchemy more striking than in the title story of "Cathedral" in which a blind man guides the hand of a sighted man as together they draw the cathedral the blind man can never see.

Author biography

Raymond Carver was born in Clatskanie, Oregon, in 1938. His father was a saw-mill worker and his mother was a waitress and clerk. He married early and for years writing had to come second to earning a living for his young family. Despite, small-press publication, it was not until *Will You Please Be Quiet Please?* appeared in 1976 that his work began to reach a wider audience. This was the year in which he gave up alcohol, which had contributed to the collapse of his marriage. In 1977 he met the writer Tess Gallagher, with whom he shared the last eleven years of his life. During this prolific period he wrote three collections of stories, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, *Cathedral* and *Elephant*. *Fires*, a collection of essays, poems and stories, appeared in 1985, followed by three further collections of poetry. In 1988 he completed the poetry collection *A New Path to the Waterfall*.

Discussion starters

- Is the narrator a sympathetic protagonist? Does your opinion of him change as the story progresses? Does the narrator develop or change or "grow" over the course of the evening?
- Discuss the primary emotions displayed by the narrator throughout, and how you understood them in terms of the life he leads? 3.) What is the narrator's attitude toward his wife? Describe the narrator's marriage.
- What kind of marriage do they have? Is the narrator's jealousy of Robert irrational? What is it about Robert that unsettles the narrator? What does Robert do to put the narrator at ease?
- How does Robert shatter the narrator's preconceived notions of blind people? How do his appearance and bearing resist every stereotypical image the narrator has about blind people, and is it upsetting?
- What does the narrator learn from his encounter with Robert? Is the ending convincing? Do you believe that there will be a significant change in his outlook from this point on?

- Contrast the author's tone and the narrator's mood at the opening of the story with the tone and mood at the end. How does the change in style reflect the change that has occurred in the narrator?
- What is the significance of Carver's choice of a cathedral as catalyst for the narrator's learning experience? What added dimension does this symbol bring to our understanding of the story?
- Describe Carver's style.

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