



There's Something I Want You to Do: Stories (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Charles Baxter



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From one of the great masters of the contemporary short story, here is an astonishing collection that showcases Charles Baxter's unique ability to unveil the remarkable in the seemingly inconsequential moments of an eerie yet familiar life.

Penetrating and prophetic, the ten inter-related stories in *There's Something I Want You to Do* are held together by a surreally intricate web of cause and effect—one that slowly ensnares both fictional bystanders and enraptured readers. Benny, an architect and hopeless romantic, is robbed on his daily walk along the Mississippi River, and the blow of a baseball bat to the back of his knee feels like a strike from God. A drug dealer named Black Bird reads *Othello* while waiting for customers in a bar. Elijah, a pediatrician and the father of two, is visited nightly by visions of Alfred Hitchcock. Meanwhile, a dog won't stop barking, a passenger on a transatlantic flight reads aloud from the book of Psalms during turbulence, and a scream carries itself through the early-morning Minneapolis air.

As the collection progresses, we delve more deeply into the private lives of these characters, exploring their fears, fantasies, and obsessions. They appear and reappear, performing praiseworthy and loathsome acts in equal measure in response to the request—or demand—lodged in each story's center. The result is a portrait of human nature as seen from the tightrope that spans the distance between dreams and waking life—a portrait that could have arisen only from Baxter's singular vision. Readers will be stunned by his uncanny understanding of human attraction and left to puzzle over the meaning of virtue and the unpredictable and mysterious ways in which we behave.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Charles Baxter’s stories proceed with steady grace, nimble humor, quiet authority, and thrilling ingeniousness. . . . He is a great writer.” —Lorrie Moore, author of *Bark*

“Winning and ingenious.”—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Charles Baxter is nothing short of a national literary treasure. To read these stories—hilarious, tragic, surprising, and indelibly human—is to receive revelation at the hands of a master.” —Julie Orringer, author of *The Invisible Bridge*

“*There’s Something I Want You to Do* is in many ways Baxter’s *Winesburg, Ohio*, an intimate look at the emotional lives of everyday folks sharing the same geography.” —*The Boston Globe*

“Subtle, humane and, in the best sense, clever.” —*The Plain Dealer*

“Very entertaining. . . . As this compelling collection reminds us, it’s an awfully strange world out there.” —*Chicago Tribune*

“Few writers, if any, are as capable of pursuing such an inevitable truth as this—and in so graceful, subdued, and artful a manner—as Charles Baxter.” —*Philadelphia Inquirer*

“[*There’s Something I Want You to Do*’s] characters slip in and out of one another’s stories, and while some never meet, they eventually constitute . . . a shimmering web of interconnectedness.” —*The New York Times Book Review*

“Nearly as organic as a novel, [*There’s Something I Want You to Do*] is more intriguing, more fun in disclosing its connective tissues through tales that stand well on their own.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Baxter creates empathetic and nuanced portraits of human nature. . . . Reminds us that happiness, like morality, is fluid and that we must guard it accordingly.”—*The Miami Herald*

“A master of the form contemplates the abhorrent and admirable choices we make and what finally leads a person to choose the high road.” —*O, The Oprah Magazine*

“An explosive addition to [Baxter’s] already stellar resume.” —*Den of Geek*, “Must Read Fiction of the Year”

“Baxter’s writing is sharper than ever.” —*The Cedar Rapids Gazette*

“Will make readers hungry for more.” —*Library Journal* (starred review)

“Baxter’s writing is characterized by . . . unselfconsciousness [and] artless clarity. His characters take on

their own lives. They subsist so independently of their creator that we almost forget that there is a creator.”
—*The Rumpus*

“With his latest collection, Charles Baxter has given us something altogether new in contemporary fiction: a series of moral tales that contain zero moralizing. . . . Here is a cast of characters unparalleled since Sherwood Anderson’s *Book of Grotesques*, with a modern-day Minneapolis as tangible and strange as his Winesburg, Ohio.” —Jamie Quatro, author of *I Want to Show You More*

“Five stories named for virtues and five for vices make up this collection from a master craftsman. . . . Baxter’s characters muddle through small but pivotal moments, not so much confrontations as crossroads between love and destruction, desire and death. . . . The prose resonates with distinctive turns of phrase that capture human ambiguity and uncertainty: trouble waits patiently at home, irony is the new chastity, and a dying man lives in the house that pain designed for him.” —*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

About the Author

Charles Baxter is the author of the novels *The Feast of Love* (nominated for the National Book Award), *The Soul Thief*, *Saul and Patsy*, *Shadow Play*, and *First Light*, and the story collections *Gryphon*, *Believers*, *A Relative Stranger*, *Through the Safety Net*, and *Harmony of the World*. The stories “Bravery” and “Charity,” which appear in *There’s Something I Want You to Do*, were included in *Best American Short Stories*. Baxter lives in Minneapolis and teaches at the University of Minnesota and in the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.

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Three weeks later, on his way out to his evening stroll, Benny passed two of his friends, the lesbians from down the hall, Donna and Ellie, just outside the building. They referred to themselves alphabetically as “the D and the E,” and tonight they were walking their keeshonds. Engaged in conversation, they waved to him as he crossed the block. He waved back, not wanting to interrupt them. When the two women were talking together, the bond between them—heads turned in a mutual gaze, slightly bowed, the conversation quiet and slow and half-smiling—seemed more intimate than sex. Their friendship, no, their love, resembled?..?..?what? Prayer, or some other category that Benny didn’t currently believe in.

By the time he reached the Washington Avenue Bridge across the Mississippi, he had worked up a light sweat. He planned to cross the river, turn around, and then head back. He would shower before bed and be asleep by midnight. Tonight the joggers and lovers were out in force, along with the shabby old men who held out their hands for money. A panhandle was like a scream: you never knew what was appropriate, how much help to offer, what to do.

Crossing the bridge on the pedestrian level, he counted the number of people on foot. He liked taking inventories; solid figures reassured him. About seven people were out tonight, including one guy with a backpack sprinting in Benny’s direction, two people strolling, and a young woman with a vaguely studenty appearance who stood motionless, leaning against the railing and staring down at the river. The sodium lights gave them all an orange-tan tint. The young woman tapped her fingers along the guardrail, took out a cell phone, and after taking a picture of herself, dropped the phone into the river below. She licked her lips and laughed softly as the phone disappeared into the dark.

Benny stopped. Something was about to happen. As he watched, she gathered herself up and with a quick athletic movement hoisted herself over so that she was standing on the railing’s other side with her arms braced on the metalwork behind her. If she released her arms and leaned forward, she would plunge down into the river. One jogger went past her without noticing what she was doing. What *was* she doing? Benny

hurried toward her.

Seeing him out of the corner of her eye, she turned and smirked.

“Stop!” he commanded. “Wait. Don’t!” He wasn’t sure what to say. “What are you doing? Who are you?”

“I’m nobody. Who are you?”

“I’m just Benny,” he said. “That’s dangerous. Please. Why are you doing that?”

“No reason. For fun. A cheap thrill. I’m bungee jumping,” she said. “Only without the bungee. See the cord?” She pointed down to where no cord was visible. “Just *kidding!* It’s *imaginary!* Also, I’ve been feeling real cold behind my eyes,” she said, “so I thought I’d do something exciting to heat myself up.” Her speech style was oddly animated, and she seemed very pretty in a drab sort of way, like an honorable-mention beauty queen who hadn’t taken proper care of herself. Something was off in the grooming department. Her long brown hair fell over her shoulders, and her T-shirt had a corporate logo and the words JUST DO IT across the front. Her eyes, when she glanced at Benny, were deep and penetrating. Her feet in sandals displayed toenails polished a bright red, so that under the streetlights they had the appearance of war paint. She gave off a shadowy gleam. “I’ve been feeling kind of temporary lately,” she said. “How about you, *Benny?* You been feeling permanent?”

He reached out for her arm and clasped it. “Yes, I have. So. Please come back,” he said.

“Fuck you doin’?” she said, laughing. “Don’t harass me. Let go. Let go of me or maybe I’ll actually jump.” Irony was the new form of chastity and was everywhere these days. You never knew whether people meant what they said or whether it was all a goof.

“No,” Benny said. “I don’t think so. I won’t let go.” To his astonishment, a couple strolled past them without paying them any mind at all. He thought of crying out for help, but noise might panic this woman, startle her, inspiring her to make her move, unless she was playing a late-night prank. After all, she *was* grinning. Dear God, he thought, the perfect incongruity of that grin. He felt a sudden resolve to hold on to her forever if he had to.

“This isn’t a big plan I have,” she said cheerfully. “It’s just a personal happening.” She waited. “Don’t you ever want to get on the other side of the boundary? It’s so exciting over here, so lethal. It looks back at you.” She waited. “So much fun. And against boredom? Boredom,” she said urgently, “must be defeated.”

“You shouldn’t be standing there. It’s a terrible idea.”

“Don’t be like that,” she said, staring down at the river. “Okay, maybe it’s a terrible idea, but it’s *my* idea.” Now she appeared to be sneering. She had a blue barrette in her hair. “Do you think it would take a long time to fall? What would falling feel like?” She tipped her head back. “I think it would feel like being famous. I’d laugh all the way down. I’d sign autographs.”

“No. It would feel like nothing. Then like being ripped apart by water. It’d *really* hurt.” He waited with his hand around her arm. He was quite strong; like everyone else he knew, he went to the gym and kept fit, and just when he had begun to consider how much she weighed and how long he’d be able to hold on to her if she leaped off the ledge and dangled there, he remembered to ask, “What’s your name?”

"I won't tell you," she said. "Okay, yes, I will. It's Desdemona."

"Thanks." He moved slightly so that he was behind her, and still holding her arm, he moved his other arm so that it encircled her waist. A car honked at them. "So-called Desdemona," he said, "please come back to this side. Okay?"

"Um, no? Just leave me alone? Besides, don't you even want to get on the other side of the railing *with* me? How about some solidarity? Don't you ever want a thrill? Or a chill? Or a spill? Stop *touching* me!"

"No."

She laughed. "Such a spoilsport. Such a *square*." She twisted her head back. "You must be from around here. You smell of the Midwest."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Bob Pratt:

The reason? Because this *There's Something I Want You to Do: Stories* (Vintage Contemporaries) is an unordinary book that the inside of the reserve waiting for you to snap it but latter it will surprise you with the secret that inside. Reading this book close to it was fantastic author who have write the book in such wonderful way makes the content on the inside easier to understand, entertaining approach but still convey the meaning completely. So , it is good for you because of not hesitating having this any longer or you going to regret it. This amazing book will give you a lot of gains than the other book have got such as help improving your proficiency and your critical thinking means. So , still want to hesitate having that book? If I ended up you I will go to the publication store hurriedly.

Shannon Lynch:

Playing with family inside a park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with buddies is thing that usually you will have done when you have spare time, after that why you don't try point that really opposite from that. Just one activity that make you not sense tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition of information. Even you love *There's Something I Want You to Do: Stories* (Vintage Contemporaries), you can enjoy both. It is excellent combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hang type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout fellas. What? Still don't obtain it, oh come on its known as reading friends.

Kimberly Wheatley:

The book untitled *There's Something I Want You to Do: Stories* (Vintage Contemporaries) contain a lot of information on that. The writer explains your ex idea with easy way. The language is very easy to understand all the people, so do certainly not worry, you can easy to read this. The book was published by famous author. The author will take you in the new era of literary works. It is possible to read this book because you can please read on your smart phone, or product, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site and order it. Have a nice read.

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