

## Praise for *Ninety-Nine Stories of God*

“Funny, fantastical . . . Williams says more in a page-long scene than most can say in a chapter; it’s fitting, then, that her very short collection manages to encompass such an eternal theme with wit and grace” *Huffington Post*

“A treasure trove of bafflements and tiny masterpieces . . . chains of association appeared and disappeared like currents in a swift-flowing stream” *New York Times*

“Radically compressed . . . new territory for Williams, with a brevity and a strict whimsy you might encounter in Lydia Davis’s work . . . easy to follow and hard to fathom; easy to enjoy and harder to absorb” *New Yorker*

“A collection of tiny, wry masterpieces” *New York Times Book Review* Notable Books of the Year

Praise for *The Visiting Privilege*

“Perhaps the greatest living master of the short story . . . easily taking her place among the ranks of Mavis Gallant, Flannery O’Connor, Grace Paley, John Cheever and Raymond Carver” **NEEL MUKHERJEE**,  
*Guardian* Books of the Year

“Joy Williams is a stone-cold 100% American original . . . a treasure trove of high-octane prose and surreal wit”  
**RUPERT THOMSON**, *Observer* Books of the Year

“An electric and dangerously human volume”  
**PHILIP HENSHER**, *Spectator* Books of the Year

“How to tell the story of a 500-page collection of stories spanning more than 40 years? Especially when I really want to just exclaim, ‘Oh, Oh, OH!’ in a state of steadily mounting rapture” **GEOFF DYER**, *Observer*

# 99

*Stories of God*

JOY  
WILLIAMS



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# 1

A woman who adored her mother, and had mourned her death every day for years now, came across some postcards in a store that sold antiques and various other bric-a-brac. The postcards were of unexceptional scenes, but she was drawn to them and purchased several of wild beaches and forest roads. When she got home, she experienced an overwhelming need to send a card to her mother.

What she wrote was not important. It was the need that was important.

She put the card in an envelope and sent it to her mother's last earthly address, a modest farmhouse that had long since been sold and probably sold again.

Within a week she received a letter, the writing on the envelope unmistakably her mother's. Even the green ink her mother had favored was the same.

The woman never opened the letter, nor did she  
send any other postcards to that address.

The letter, in time, though only rumored to be,  
caused her children, though grown, much worry.

POSTCARD

## 2

The breeder of the black German shepherds said her kennel was in Sedona, a place known far and wide for its good vibrations, its harmonic integrity. But the kennel was actually in Jerome, thirty miles away, an unnerving ghost town set above a vast pit from which copper ore had been extracted. The largest building in Jerome was the old sanatorium, now derelict. The town's historian insisted that it had served all the population in the town's heyday, not just the diseased and troubled, and that babies had even been born there.

In any case, the dog coming from Jerome rather than Sedona was telling, people thought.

Another something that could be the basis of the dog's behavior was the fact that her mistress always wore sunglasses, day and night. Like everybody else, the dog never got to see her eyes. When the woman

had people over, she placed a big bowl of sunglasses outside the front door and everyone put on a pair before entering. It was easier than locking the dog in the bedroom.

NOCHE

### 3

A noted humanist was invited to take part in a discussion about the dangers and opportunities that would arise if intelligent life forms on other planets were discovered. His remarks, though no one disagreed with them, became so heated that the producers later, in light of what had happened, decided to edit him out of the program.

There was consensus that discovering intelligent life forms on other planets was probable and even essential to the human endeavor, but much of the conversation concerned whether any life form discovered would hold a candle to human intelligence and creativity.

The humanist, who was also a noted scholar, argued that nothing could be discovered that could write a symphony, as so many of our brilliant composers had done, or be capable of *appreciating* the

symphony. The ability to *appreciate* the symphony seemed to him quite as important as the actual composition of it.

The humanist/scholar became quite emotional in conceiving of the world devoid of human beings, which was a possibility brought on by one disaster or another, due, it must be said, to our own actions. This would be the worst thing he could imagine—worlds devoid of human beings, even if these worlds were populated by other intelligent and enterprising life forms.

After the taping, the humanist/scholar, whose name was Charles Thaxter Ormand, the acronym of which, in the ever-evolving and vibrant field of text messaging, would be *check this out*, retired for lunch to one of the city's many small, fine restaurants. He ordered that day's special. When it was brought to him, whole and beautifully prepared and presented, he took a moment to study it before consuming it.

To his discomfort, he detected from the plate the faint sound of the most beautiful music. It was exquisite, joyous yet heartbreaking, a delicate furling of gratitude and praise gradually diminishing, then gone.

Horrificed, he continued to look at the speckled trout that, according to the waiter, had been taken mere hours before from its mountain stream. Then, with a cry, he rushed into the kitchen, where he attacked both the waiter and the chef with a variety of heavy utensils before he was subdued and taken away for observation at the nearest psychiatric facility. His ravings about the trout being no more *appreciated* than the ravings of any of the other lunatics there.

AUBADE

## 4

Passing Clouds was the brand of cigarette favored by the great English contralto Kathleen Ferrier. According to one of her early teachers, her magnificent voice was attributed to “a wonderful cavity at the back of her throat.” This was the only explanation given for the purity and power of her voice.

Near the end of her brief life, Ferrier sang Mahler’s symphony “The Song of the Earth.” We die, but life is fresh, eternally fresh, was Mahler’s ecstatic conviction. Nature renews herself year after year . . . for ever and ever.

Ferrier was in tears when she concluded “The Song of the Earth,” so distraught that she omitted the final *ewig*, the final *ever*.

CAVITY

## 5

At some point, Kafka became a vegetarian.

Afterward, visiting an aquarium in Berlin, he spoke to the fish through the glass.

“Now at last I can look at you in peace, I don’t eat you anymore.”

NEVERTHELESS