



I Can't Stay Long

Laurie Lee

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Reading this book is like a holiday - an interlude of pure pleasure.

In it Laurie Lee has collected all of his occasional writing that he cares to preserve, and proves himself to be as much a magician in essay form as he is in his full-length prose works. Some of these pieces come from a world which is now well known and loved by almost everyone: that of the Gloucestershire childhood celebrated in *Cider with Rosie*. One is tragic and deeply moving, inspired by a visit to Aberfan a year after the disaster there. Many were brought home by Laurie Lee the traveller, from Holland, Tuscany, Mexico, Ireland, the West Indies, a film festival in Cannes. In all of them he displays the gifts that make him one of the best-loved writers now at work in Britain. This is a collection to buy in pairs - one for the bedside, and one to give to a friend.

Cover design and illustration by John Gorham.

I Can't Stay Long Details

Date : Published December 1st 1995 by Chivers (first published 1975)

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Author : Laurie Lee

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Nancy says

I loved this book, a collection of essays, the second by Laurie Lee that I read during a recent convalescence. In Cider with Rosie, he describes English village life with just horses for transport.

In this one, in an essay called "adventures of the boy reader," he points out that the other great change in English life during his childhood, the 19-teens and early 1920s, was the spread of true literacy to the villages of England.

"We [my generation] ... were the inheritors, after centuries of darkness, of our country's first literate peasantry. My mother and father, the children of a coachman and a sailor, read well and were largely self-taught. But their parents could do little more than spell out their names--which they were not often called on to do--and if given a book were likely to turn it over in their hands, cough loudly, and lay it aside."

And there is much more: he writes movingly of a terrible tragedy that took place in Aberfan, a Welsh mining town, in 1966, when a man-made mountain slid down, like a mudslide, onto the village school, and killed almost all of the children.

Yue says

The first two parts of random prose I love. Not so much the third part where it was exceedingly travel literature.

Joanne says

Beautifully written

Alan Fricker says

A mixed bag of a collection - excellent where he has a tale to tell but dull when listing the things he saw on a particular trip. Mostly it makes me realise that I need to read " As I walked out one midsummer morning". Librarians will enjoy the first story "True adventures of a boy reader" the library is "an explosive discovery"

Koren Zailckas says

A religious fucking experience.

David says

A true master at work. Not a word out of place, brilliantly capturing mood, landscape and soul. You could read his short essays on his childhood, on places he's visited and more ephemeral subjects like love for ever and never tire of them. All holding interest and discovery.

Katie King says

Carrying it around with me, hoping Lee's genius as a writer will soak through a bit.

Michael says

I dithered about my rating for *I Can't Stay Long*. It's a collection of short articles, essays and memoir that Lee put together from the flotsam and jetsam of papers on his study floor, and the result is somewhat uneven.

Divided into three sections, Part One is a return to Slad, Lee's childhood home and the setting of his brilliant memoir, *Cider With Rosie*. The pieces in this section are generally 4 and 5 star worthy, particularly *A Drink with a Witch* and *First Love*.

Part Two has four pieces about abstracts: *Love*; *Appetite*; *Charm* and *Paradise*. Then, *The Firstborn* is Lee's hymn to his wife and their first child together (though not Lee's first child, as he had fathered another daughter with a different partner earlier in life). There are some nice passages in this, but somehow it didn't quite hit the mark with me. Although there is a lot of emotion, there is also curiously a certain distance and detachment. The best piece in this section is, by far, *The Village that Lost its Children*. This is an account of Lee's visit to the Welsh village of Aberfan, a year after the disaster that killed 144 people, 116 of them children. In fact, this is probably the stand-out piece in the whole book. Lee captures the quiet despair of those still struggling to come to terms with a wholly-preventable loss of life; the tensions between those bereaved and those whose families escaped the disaster (but not its consequences) and the problems caused by the huge sum of money donated to the village by well-wishers from all over the world.

Part Three is a series of travel sketches of some of the places Lee had visited, from Beirut to Ireland to Mexico, and points in between, including an early flight on Concorde as part of a press contingent, an experience he found distinctly underwhelming!. This is the most uneven section of the book: I found some of these articles positively boring, which was most surprising to me as I've loved all of Lee's other writings. Still, there are some good ones in there too.

Overall, then, I'd give this book 3.5 if I could, but as I can't I must round down rather than up. This is a book worth reading, and then worth keeping for the gems amongst the pebbles.

Chiefdonkey Bradey says

Gorgeous sumptuous prose, like gulping bumpers of dizzying rioja

Brian says

Some very interesting (The Village that Lost its Children, Ibiza High Fifties, Eight-Year-Old World) and some less so, as you would expect in a book of previously published essays and journalism.

Janet says

Collection of essays. Some entertaining passages, very Laurie Lee. I particularly enjoyed 'True Adventures of a Boy Reader', 'Eight Year Old World', 'A Drink with a Witch', 'Hills of Tuscany', 'Mexico', 'A Wake in Warsaw', 'Voices of Ireland'. Lee is at his best when writing about wild landscapes and the quirkiness of ordinary people. Liked it, but found myself missing the delights of Cider With Rosie and As I Walked Out.

Pam says

Short stories and essays - some more interesting than others

Michelle says

I first read this 30 years ago. The images it painted and the thoughts it evoked are still vivid. Strongly recommended.

Silvia says

A fantastically written collection of short stories. I particularly liked his moving words to his newborn daughter, and overall it just makes you want to travel. But not travel in today's way, going from hotel chain to hotel chain or going places to be seen (there's a fantastic critique of today's tourism in the story set in Ibiza) or looking for home comforts abroad, as he says. No, it makes you want to travel slowly, to take pleasure in nature, exploring and walking.

Mark McKenny says

Back to his best with this, the exquisite Laurie Lee with some of his finest writing. Stories like 'A drink with a witch' and the non-fiction piece about Wales 'The village that lost its children' will I'm sure stay with me a long time. It's the perfect way to round off my reading of Laurie Lee. I've thoroughly enjoyed reading his work (still have a bit left to read) and I recommend him to all. Cider with Rosie is his best.
