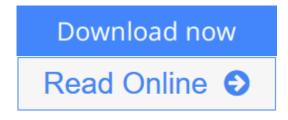


The Beginning of Spring

By Penelope Fitzgerald



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Short-listed for the Booker Prize

"Fitzgerald was the author of several slim, perfect novels. *The Blue Flower* and *The Beginning of Spring* both had me abuzz for days the first time I read them. She was curiously perfect."— Teju Cole, author of *Open City*

"Writing so precise and lilting it can make you shiver." — *Los Angeles Times*

March 1913. Moscow is stirring herself to meet the beginning of spring. English painter Frank Reid returns from work one night to find that his wife has gone away; no one knows where or why, or whether she'll ever come back. All Frank knows for sure is that he is now alone and must find someone to care for his three young children.

Into Frank's life comes Lisa Ivanovna, a quiet, calming beauty from the country, untroubled to the point of seeming simple. But is she? And why has Frank's bookkeeper, Selwyn Crane, gone to such lengths to bring these two together?

This new edition features an introduction by Andrew Miller, author of *Pure*, along with new cover art.

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The Beginning of Spring By Penelope Fitzgerald Bibliography

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- 272 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In March 1913, Frank Reid's wife abruptly leaves him and Moscow for her native England. Naturally, she takes their daughters and son with her. The children, however, only make it as far as the train station--and even after returning home remain unaffected by their brief exile. "They ought either to be quieter or more noisy than before," their father thinks, "and it was disconcerting that they seemed to be exactly the same." Frank's routines, however, drift into disorder as he tries desperately to take charge of life at home and work. Even his printing plant is suddenly confronted by the specters of modernization and utter instability.

In Penelope Fitzgerald's fiction, affection and remorse are all too often allied, and desire and design seem never to meet. Frank wants little more than a quiet, confident life--something for which he is deeply unsuited, and which Russia certainly will not go out of her way to provide. *The Beginning of Spring* is filled with echoes of past wrongs and whispers of the revolution to come, even if the author evokes these with abrupt comic brio. (In one disturbance, "A great many shots had hit people for whom they were not intended.") As ever, Fitzgerald makes us care for--and want to know ever more about--her characters, even the minor players. Her two-page description of Frank's chief type compositor, for instance, is a miracle of precision and humor, sympathy and mystery. And the accountant Selwyn Crane--a Tolstoy devotée, self-published poet, and expert at making others feel guilty--is a sublime creation. His appetite for do-gooding is insatiable. After one fit of apparent altriusm, "Selwyn subsided. Now that he saw everything was going well, his mind was turning to his next charitable enterprise. With the terrible aimlessness of the benevolent, he was casting round for a new misfortune." As she evokes her household of tears and laughter, Fitzgerald's prose is as witty as ever, rendering the past present and the modern timeless. --*Kerry Fried*

From Publishers Weekly

Booker Prize-winner Fitzgerald (Offshore ; Innocence) reveals here the depth of a distinct and imaginative talent to amuse. Set in Moscow in the spring of 1913, the story concerns an English household that has fallen apart with the unexpected flight of Nellie Reid, a good and proper wife and heretofore devoted mother of three young children. (Fitzgerald is especially good at very droll children.) Nellie's husband, Frank, must carry on with his family and printing business while holding out hope for her return. A mysterious young woman from the countryside--she may be a dryad--is engaged to care for the children, and the plot, such as it is, takes many unexpected turns. But one doesn't read Fitzgerald for plot structure so much as for her sheer powers of invention: her novel raises more questions than it means to answer. Rich in subtle characterizations, wit and wonderfully textured prose, Fitzgerald's seventh novel succeeds in evoking the very essence of life one long-ago spring at 22 Lipka Street. Copyright 1989 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

Set in Moscow in 1913, this tale chronicles several months in the life of Frank Reid, who is mysteriously deserted by his wife and must engage the simple peasant girl Lisa Ivanova to care for his three small children. Reid plods along in a remarkably mundane existence, relating to everyone with an amazing, unflagging apathy. Even an armed student radical who breaks into his shop and shoots at him cannot stir him to action. Lisa, to her credit, manages to stir him briefly to passion. The sole bright spot in this otherwise bleak, boring saga is Reid's hilariously precocious daughter, Dolly, whose abrupt, insightful comments are priceless. In this story, resolved anticlimactically in the last line of the text, there is very little spring, but a lot of grim, eternal winter.

- Ronald L. Coombs, SUNY Health Science Ctr. at Brooklyn Lib.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Thomas Abrams:

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Harry Nelson:

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Jennifer Crowe:

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Marlyn Melia:

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