



Phone Calls from the Dead

By Wendy Brenner

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Phone Calls from the Dead By Wendy Brenner

A bodybuilder is charged with superhuman energy and an ability to make lightbulbs explode. A grieving father tries to communicate with his dead son via a tape recorder. A high school girl claims to have her uncle's nipple in an envelope. A thirtysomething woman is fired from her dead-end job at Manpower and comes to understand her life through the experience of a German shepherd. Four ornery squirrels, tied together by their tails, struggle to maintain their sanity.

Ten stories in all, the highly original PHONE CALLS FROM THE DEAD pulses with meaning. Alive and odd and needy, the characters in Wendy Brenner's stories grapple with the extraordinary and the ordinary, searching for answers from unlikely sources, striving to connect with each other and with something greater than themselves. Amidst a world of technological, natural, and possibly supernatural phenomena, they struggle with the most human of losses and longings.

Named one of twenty-five fiction writers to watch by *Writer's Digest* (along with Allegra Goodman, Jhumpa Lahiri, and William Gay), Brenner has been paving a new path through American fiction ever since her first collection, *Large Animals in Everyday Life*. *Publishers Weekly*, in a starred review, described that collection as "chock-full of pitch-perfect dialogue and dead-on descriptions . . . intoxicatingly original." In *PHONE CALLS FROM THE DEAD*, the stories do just that, and then go a step farther. Whether it moves you to uncontrollable laughter or to tears, you won't soon forget Wendy Brenner's work.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The narrator of "The Anomalist" one of the 10 stories gathered in Brenner's quirkily deadpan second collection (after *Large Animals in Everyday Life*) explains that he has remained in Florida because he once saw a zoo plaque that promised buffalo sightings "if you're at the right place at the right time."

Unfortunately, he never seems to be where he's meant to be, and he has little left save the hope that great, galumphing beasts will lumber through the foreground of his life, changing him irrevocably. Like the short-circuited phone system in "Awareness," which unwittingly places calls to itself, Brenner's characters are protectively self-sufficient; like the operators who answer these phantom calls, they repeatedly experience the disappointment of an empty dial tone. Immunized against sentimentality by great doses of reason, characters have lover's quarrels that are "showdown[s] about beauty." Intellectual effort keeps Brenner's protagonists from falling apart entirely, but again and again they are undone by small gestures (a child's grasp, a sticky kiss) emotional depth charges that cannot be denied. The stories end with tiny, unexpected epiphanies: a girl lamenting the false promise of Snoopy, a man waiting for his dead son to pick up the phone, a man rocked in the arms of a golden-hearted hooker. Brenner's witty, empathetic voice animates a tawdry, urban Florida filled with the lost and the lonely, stale lives refreshed briefly by fleeting moments of passion. (Sept.) Forecast: Brenner, a contributing writer for the *Oxford American*, won the Flannery O'Connor Award for her first collection. Readers familiar with her work will snap up *Phone Calls from the Dead*, and strong reviews and an author tour should broaden her reach.

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From Library Journal

In her second collection, Brenner, whose *Large Animals in Everyday Life* won the Flannery O'Connor Award, showcases her ability to conjure up bizarre situations and circumstances in the lives of ordinary people. A scientist learns to enjoy human relationships while compiling an encyclopedia of anomalies, while a high school student grosses out friends with her uncle's nipple, which she claims to have in an envelope. A father who mourns his son believes it's possible to communicate with him via tape recorder; four squirrels, tied together for a long time, are separated by a vet so they can live separately; and a very perceptive boy has a relationship with an unborn friend. Brenner is a gifted chronicler of these often poor and downtrodden characters, whose lives are marked by the oddity of the everyday world around them. Ellen R. Cohen, Rockville, MD

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From [Booklist](#)

Coping mechanisms, codependent relationships, dysfunctional families--what is normal, anyway? Brenner addresses the dynamics of unhealthy relationships of all types, placing her characters in absurd situations and exaggerating their odd behavior and fixations to reveal the deeper meanings of their lives. A scientist who compulsively collects articles about unexplained anomalies falls in love with his assistant. A man whose young son drowns founds the Instrumental Transcommunication Network, which tries to communicate with the dead. A graduate student avoids working on her thesis and fantasizes about meeting a TV judge. A hospital receptionist comes to believe that the telecom system she works with is alive. Brenner's unsettling stories combine a *National Enquirer* mentality and everyday life, and her sympathetic characters seem perfectly reasonable despite their quirks. She writes with wit, easily juxtaposing pop culture and human nature in a way that gives insight into both and to the way each shapes the other. *Bonnie Johnston*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patrick Richards:

Nowadays reading books become more and more than want or need but also become a life style. This reading addiction give you lot of advantages. Associate programs you got of course the knowledge even the information inside the book in which improve your knowledge and information. The knowledge you get based on what kind of publication you read, if you want get more knowledge just go with knowledge books but if you want really feel happy read one having theme for entertaining including comic or novel. The actual Phone Calls from the Dead is kind of e-book which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

Carolyn Foley:

Reading a guide can be one of a lot of pastime that everyone in the world adores. Do you like reading book therefore. There are a lot of reasons why people love it. First reading a e-book will give you a lot of new information. When you read a book you will get new information simply because book is one of various ways to share the information or perhaps their idea. Second, examining a book will make a person more imaginative. When you studying a book especially hype book the author will bring you to imagine the story how the character types do it anything. Third, you are able to share your knowledge to others. When you read this Phone Calls from the Dead, you are able to tells your family, friends and soon about yours book. Your knowledge can inspire average, make them reading a reserve.

Dale Fain:

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Michael Brown:

Reading a publication make you to get more knowledge from the jawhorse. You can take knowledge and information coming from a book. Book is composed or printed or descriptive from each source which filled update of news. In this modern era like today, many ways to get information are available for an individual. From media social similar to newspaper, magazines, science guide, encyclopedia, reference book, new and comic. You can add your knowledge by that book. Isn't it time to spend your spare time to spread out your book? Or just searching for the Phone Calls from the Dead when you needed it?

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