What a treat! The nine stories in this collection--some never before published, others available only in anthologies or magazines--demonstrate why Elmore Leonard has achieved both bestsellerdom and critical acclaim. Ranging in length from a four-page trifle to two novellas of 50-plus pages, these are gems of sly humor, suspense, and, above all, character. Most are in the contemporary crime-fiction vein that made Leonard famous, but a few are more contemplative set pieces, and there's one fine Old West story (Leonard was a Western writer before he became a crime king). Longtime fans will recognize some familiar faces, including the U.S. marshals Raylan Givens, from 1993s Pronto and 1995s Riding the Rap, and Karen Sisco, from 1996s Out of Sight (played by J. Lo in the movie). But whether familiar or new, the people in these stories lunge off the page and seize you by the lapels. Nobody writes character and dialogue like Leonard. In fact, several tales feature some rural white-trash
bad guys who are so utterly plausible that you'll look over your shoulder next time you drive a country road. The short story format suits Leonards stripped-down style beautifully. While one or two of the slimmer pieces feel a bit disposable, all nine are engaging, and the best are breathtakingly good—the crispest, best-plotted stuff Leonard has published in years. --Nicholas H. Allison

**Personal Review: When the Women Come Out to Dance: Stories (Leonard, Elmore) by Elmore Leonard**

I heard of Elmore Leonard from watching Steven Soderburgh's excellent adaptation of his book, "Out of Sight" starring George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez, very impressed by the crisp style and dialogue and colorful characters.

There is a story called "Karen Makes Out" in this collection which is a bit old hat if you've already read or seen "Out of Sight" but otherwise the other stories are basically flawless: brisk and extremely enjoyable reads, yet you don't feel guilty afterwards for all the great fun you had, because Leonard's prose is original and top-quality, not cheesy cliche-ridden boilerplate.

It'd be nice if there were a bit more of a subtext to these stories, but oh well everyone can't be Dostoyevsky, lol. Leonard's writing has flashes of Charles Bukowski in terms of grittiness and subject matter (they both dwell in the lowermost echelons of society), with Leonard being the far more polished and restrained craftsman, without the too-overt polemics that Buke sometimes slid into. Perhaps he would be best likened to a novelist version of Tom Waits: you can get a very good feel for his vision and perspective on things even though never takes out the soapbox and preaches from it. His style and characterization say everything he needs to say.

Would love to see somebody, perhaps Soderburgh, put together a film comprised of shorts based on these short stories.

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