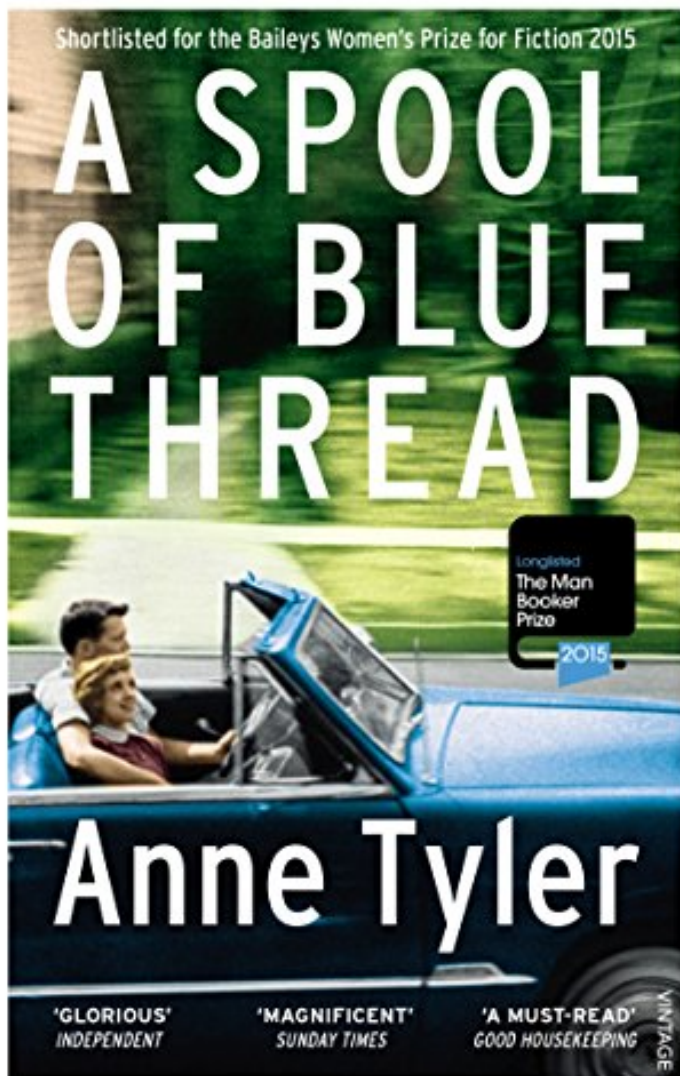


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A Spool of Blue Thread



Par Anne Tyler
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Description :

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THE NUMBER ONE BESTSELLERS
SHORTLISTED FOR THE MAN BOOKER PRIZE 2015
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A RICHARD AND JUDY BOOK CLUB PICK
It was a beautiful, breezy, yellow-and-green afternoon This is the way Abby Whitshank always begins the story of how she and Red fell in love that summers day in 1959. The whole family on the porch, half-listening as their mother tells the same tale they have heard so many times before. From that porch we spool back through the generations, witnessing the events, secrets and unguarded moments that have come to define the family. From Reds father and mother, newly arrived in Baltimore in the 1920s, to Abby and Reds grandchildren carrying the family legacy boisterously into the twenty-first century four

generations of Whitshanks, their lives unfolding in and around the sprawling, lovingly worn Baltimore house that has always been their home'One of my favourite authors' Liane Moriarty'She spins gold' Elizabeth

Buchan 'Anne Tyler has no peer' Anita Shreve'Anne Tyler is one of my favourite writers and this is a delicious book' Rachel JoyceExtraitLate one July evening in 1994, Red and Abby Whitshank had a phone call from their son Denny. They were getting ready for bed at the time. Abby was standing at the bureau in her slip, drawing hairpins one by one from her scattery sand-colored topknot. Red, a dark, gaunt man in striped pajama bottoms and a white Tshirt, had just sat down on the edge of the bed to take his socks off; so when the phone rang on the nightstand beside him, he was the one who answered. Whitshank residence, he said.And then, Well, hey there.Abbey turned from the mirror, both arms still raised to her head. Whats that, he said, without a question mark. Huh? he said. Oh, what the hell, Denny! Abby dropped her arms. Hello? he said. Wait. Hello? Hello? He was silent for a moment, and then he replaced the receiver. What? Abby asked him. Says hes gay. What? Said he needed to tell me something: hes gay. And you hung up on him! No, Abby. He hung up on me. All I said was What the hell, and he hung up on me. Click! Just like that. Oh, Red, how could you? Abby wailed. She spun away to reach for her bathroba no-color chenille that had once been pink. She wrapped it around her and tied the sash tightly. What possessed you to say that? she asked him. I didnt mean anything by it! Somebody springs something on you, youre going to say What the hell, right? Abby grabbed a handful of the hair that pouffed over her forehead. All I meant was, Red said, What the hell next, Denny? What are you going to think up next to worry us with? And he knew I meant that. Believe me, he knew. But now he can make this all my fault, my narrow-mindedness or fuddy-duddiness or whatever he wants to call it. He was glad I said that to him. You could tell by how fast he hung up on me; hed been just hoping all along that I would say the wrong thing. All right, Abby said, turning practical. Where was he calling from? How would I know where he was calling from? He doesnt have a fixed address, hasnt been in touch all summer, already changed jobs twice that we know of and probably more that we dont know of... A nineteen-year-old boy and we have no idea what part of the planet hes on! Youve got to wonder whats wrong, there. Did it sound like it was long distance? Could you hear that kind of rushing sound? Think. Could he have been right here in Baltimore? I dont know, Abby. She sat down next to him. The mattress slanted in her direction; she was a wide, solid woman. We have to find him, she said. Then, We should have that whatsitcaller ID. She leaned forward and gazed fiercely at the phone. Oh, God, I want caller ID this instant! What for? So you could phone him back and he could just let it ring? He wouldnt do that. He would know it was me. He would answer, if he knew it was me. She jumped up from the bed and started pacing back and forth, up and down the Persian runner that was worn nearly white in the middle from all the times she had paced it before. This was an attractive room, spacious and well designed, but it had the comfortably shabby air of a place whose inhabitants had long ago stopped seeing it. What did his voice sound like? she asked. Was he nervous? Was he upset? He was fine. So you say. Had he been drinking, do you think? I couldnt tell. Were other people with him? I couldnt tell, Abby. Or maybe... one other person? He sent her a sharp look. You are not thinking he was serious, he said. Of course he was serious! Why else would he say it? The boy isnt gay, Abby. How do you know that? He just isnt. Mark my words. Youre going to feel silly, by and by, like, Shoot, I overreacted. Well, naturally that is what you would want to believe. Doesnt your female intuition tell you anything at all? This is a kid who got a girl in trouble before he was out of high school! So? That doesnt mean a thing. It might even have been a symptom. Come again? We can never know with absolute certainty what another persons sex life is like. No, thank God, Red said. He bent over, with a grunt, and reached beneath the bed for his slippers. Abby, meanwhile, had stopped pacing and was staring once more at the phone. She set a hand on the receiver. She hesitated. Then she snatched up the receiver and pressed it to her ear for half a second before slamming it back down. The thing about caller ID is, Red said, more or less to himself, it seems a little like cheating. A person should be willing to take his chances, answering the phone. Thats kind of the general idea with phones, is my opinion. He heaved himself to his feet and started toward the bathroom. Behind him, Abby said, This would explain so much! Wouldnt it? If he should turn out to be gay. Red was closing the bathroom door by then, but he poked his head back out to glare at her. His fine black eyebrows, normally straight as rulers, were knotted almost together. Sometimes, he said, I rue and deplore the day I married a social worker. Then he shut the door very firmly. When he returned, Abby was sitting upright in bed with her arms clamped across the lace bosom of her nightgown. You are surely not going to try and blame Dennys problems on my profession, she told him. Im just saying a person can be too understanding, he said. Too sympathizing and pitying, like. Getting into a kids private brain. There is no such thing as too understanding. Well, count on a social worker to think that.

She gave an exasperated puff of a breath, and then she sent another glance toward the phone. It was on Red's side of the bed, not hers. Red raised the covers and got in, blocking her view. He reached over and snapped off the lamp on the nightstand. The room fell into darkness, with just a faint glow from the two tall, gauzy windows overlooking the front lawn. Red was lying flat now, but Abby went on sitting up. She said, Do you think hell call us back? Oh, yes. Sooner or later. It took all his courage to call the first time, she said. Maybe he used up every bit he had. Courage! What courage? Were his parents! Why would he need courage to call his own parents? Its you he needs it for, Abby said. Thats ridiculous. Ive never raised a hand to him. No, but you disapprove of him. Youre always finding fault with him. With the girls youre such a softie, and then Stem is more your kind of person. While Denny! Things come harder to Denny. Sometimes I think you dont like him. Abby, for Gods sake. You know thats not true. Oh, you love him, all right. But Ive seen the way you look at him Who is this person? and dont you think for a moment that he hasnt seen it too. If thats the case, Red said, how come its you hes always trying to get away from? Hes not trying to get away from me! From the time he was five or six years old, he wouldnt let you into his room. Kid preferred to change his own sheets rather than let you in to do it for him! Hardly ever brought his friends home, wouldnt say what their names were, wouldnt even tell you what he did in school all day. Get out of my life, Mom, he was saying. Stop meddling, stop prying, stop breathing down my neck. His least favorite picture book the one he hated so much he tore out all the pages, remember? had that baby rabbit that wants to change into a fish and a cloud and such so he can get away, and the mama rabbit keeps saying how she will change too and come after him. Denny ripped out every single everlasting page! That had nothing to do with You wonder why hes turned gay? Not that he has turned gay, but if he had, if its crossed his mind just to bug us with that, you want to know why? Ill tell you why: its the mother. It is always the smothering mother. Oh! Abby said. That is just so outdated and benighted and so... wrong, Im not even going to dignify it with an answer. Youre certainly using a lot of words to tell me so. And how about the father, if you want to go back to the Dark Ages for your theories? How about the macho, construction-guy father who tells his son to buck up, show some spunk, quit whining about the small stuff, climb the darn roof and hammer the slates in? You dont hammer slates in, Abby. How about him? she asked. Okay, fine! I did that. I was the worlds worst parent. Its done. There was a moment of quiet. The only sound came from outside the whisper of a car slipping past. I didnt say you were the worst, Abby said. Well, Red said. Another moment of quiet. Abby asked, Isnt there a number you can punch that will dial the last person who called? Star sixty-nine, Red said instantly. He cleared his throat. But you are surely not going to do that. Why not? Denny was the one who chose to end the conversation, might I point out. His feelings were hurt, was why, Abby said. If his feelings were hurt, hed have taken his time hanging up. He wouldnt have been so quick to cut me off. But he hung up like he was just waiting to hang up. Oh, he was practically rubbing his hands together, giving me that news! He starts right in. Id like to tell you something, he says. Before, you said it was I need to tell you something. Well, one or the other, Red said. Which was it? Does it matter? Yes, it matters. He thought a moment. Then he tried it out under his breath. I need to tell you something, he tried. Id like to tell you something. Dad, Id like to He broke off. I honestly dont remember, he said. Could you dial star sixty-nine, please? I cant figure out his reasoning. He knows Im not anti-gay. Ive got a gay guy in charge of our drywall, for Lords sake. Denny knows that. I cant figure out why he thought this would bug me. I mean, of course Im not going to be thrilled. You always want your kid to have it as easy in life as he can. But Hand me the phone, Abby said. The phone rang. Red grabbed the receiver at the very same instant that Abby flung herself across him to grab it herself. He had it first, but there was a little tussle and somehow she was the one who ended up with it. She sat up straight and said, Denny? Then she said, Oh. Jeannie. Red lay flat again. No, no, were not in bed yet, she said. There was a pause. Certainly. Whats wrong with yours? Another pause. Its no trouble at all. Ill see you at eight tomorrow. Bye. She held the receiver toward Red, and he took it from her and reached over to replace it in its cradle. She wants to borrow my car, she told him. She sank back onto her side of the bed. Then she said, in a thin, lonesome-sounding voice, I guess star sixty-nine wont work now, will it. No, Red said, I guess not. Oh, Red. Oh, what are we going to do? Well never, ever hear from him again! Hes not going to give us another chance! Now, hon, he told her. Well hear from him. I promise. And he reached for her and drew her close, settling her head on his shoulder. They lay like that for some time, until gradually Abby stopped fidgeting and her breaths grew slow and even. Red, though, went on staring up into the dark. At one point, he mouthed some words to himself in an experimental way. ...need to tell you something, he mouthed, not even quite whispering it. Then, ...like to tell you something. Then, Dad, Id like to... Dad, I need to... He tossed his head impatiently on his pillow. He started over. ...tell you something: Im gay. ...tell you something: I think Im

gay. Im gay. I think Im gay. I think I may be gay. Im gay. But eventually he grew silent, and at last he fell asleep too. Well, of course they did hear from him again. The Whitshanks werent a melodramatic family. Not even Denny was the type to disappear off the face of the earth, or sever all contact, or stop speaking or not permanently, at least. It was true that he skipped the beach trip that summer, but he might have skipped it anyhow; he had to make his pocket money for the following school year. (He was attending St. Eskil College, in Pronghorn, Minnesota.) And he did telephone in September. He needed money for textbooks, he said. Unfortunately, Red was the only one home at the time, so it wasnt a very revealing conversation. What did you talk about? Abby demanded, and Red said, I told him his textbooks had to come out of his earnings. I mean, did you talk about that last phone call? Did you apologize? Did you explain? Did you ask him any questions? We didnt really get into it. Red! Abby said. This is classic! This is such a classic reaction: a young person announces hes gay and his family just carries on like before, pretending they didnt hear. Well, fine, Red said. Call him back. Get in touch with his dorm. Abby looked uncertain. What reason should I give him for calling? she asked. Say you want to grill him. Ill just wait till he phones again, she decided. But when he phoned again which he did a month or so later, when Abby was there to answer it was to talk about his plane reservations for Christmas vacation. He wanted to change his arrival date, because first he was going to Hibbing to visit his girlfriend. His girlfriend! What could I say? Abby asked Red later. I had to say, Okay, fine. What could you say, Red agreed. He didnt refer to the subject again, but Abby herself sort of simmered and percolated all those weeks before Christmas. You could tell she was just itching to get things out in the open. The rest of the family edged around her warily. They knew nothing about the gay announcement Red and Abby had concurred on that much, not to tell them without Dennys say-so but they could sense that something was up. It was Abbys plan (though not Reds) to sit Denny down and have a nice heart-to-heart as soon as he got home. But on the morning of the day that his plane was due in, they had a letter from St. Eskil reminding them of the terms of their contract: the Whitshanks would be responsible for the next semesters tuition even though Denny had withdrawn. Withdrawn, Abby repeated. She was the one who had opened the letter, although both of them were reading it. The slow, considering way she spoke brought out all the words ramifications. Denny had withdrawn; he was withdrawn; he had withdrawn from the family years ago. What other middle-class American teenager lived the way he did flitting around the country like a vagrant, completely out of his parents control, getting in touch just sporadically and neglecting whenever possible to give them any means of getting in touch with him? How had things come to such a pass? They certainly hadnt allowed the other children to behave this way. Red and Abby looked at each other for a long, despairing moment. Understandably, therefore, the subject that dominated Christmas that year was Dennys leaving school. (He had decided school was a waste of money, was all he had to say, since he didnt have the least idea what he wanted to do in life. Maybe in a year or two, he said.) His gayness, or his non-gayness, just seemed to get lost in the shuffle. I can almost see now why some families pretend they werent told, Abby said after the holidays. Mm-hmm, Red said, poker-faced. *Revue de presse* Graceful and capacious . . . Quintessential Anne Tyler, as well as quintessential American comedy. Tyler has a knack for turning sitcom situations into something far deeper and more moving. Her great gift is playing against the American dream, the dark side of which is the falsehood at its heart: that given hard work and good intentions, any family can attain the Norman Rockwell ideal of happiness . . . Shes a comic novelist, and a wise one. *New York Times Book* Anne Tylers novels are invitations to spend time in the houses of the Baltimore neighborhood that she has built house by house, block by block, word by word over her long and bright career. *Francine Prose, The New York of Books* Tyler has proved again and again that a chronicle of middle-class family life in Baltimore can illuminate the human condition as acutely as any novel of ideas, albeit with a more modest demeanor . . . The Whitshanks [are] rendered with such immediacy and texture that they might be our next-door neighbors. *Los Angeles Times* Happily, *A Spool of Blue Thread* is a throwback to the meaty family dramas with which Tyler won her popularity in the 1980s . . . As in the best of her novels, she here extends her warmest affection to the erring, the inconstant, and the mismatched the people who are like anybody else, in Reds words. *Wall Street Journal* An act of literary enchantment . . . How can it be so wonderful? . . . Tyler remains among the best chroniclers of family life this country has ever produced . . . Some of the most lovely and loving writing Tyler has ever done. *Washington Post* Its been a long time since I read a book I wished would not end, purposely slowing my progress to save a bit for later. *A Spool of Blue Thread* was that kind of book . . . The Whitshanks are us, in a way, and this makes them endlessly interesting to watch, as well as very touching. *Newsday* Well-built, homey and unpretentious . . . Readers of any age should have no trouble relating . . . We can only hope that Tyler will continue spooling out her colorful Baltimore tales

for a long time to come. NPR.org Among her finest . . . There's no novelist living today who writes more insightfully (and often humorously) than Tyler does about the fictions and frictions of family life. Baltimore Sun A Spool of Blue Thread deserves to stand among Tylers best writing. Christian Science Monitor Tyler is easily the closest we have to an American Chekhov . . . [Her] books will outlive us all . . . Tyler has rarely been given credit as subversive, because her style is so simple, direct, and sincere. But the stories she tells often detonate their own structure, and resonate long after many more superficially dazzling novels have faded . . . No one has been doing it longer, and by now no one does it better. Buffalo News In warm, lucid prose, Tyler skips back and forth through the twentieth century to depict the Whitshanks. The New Yorker Fifty years, and Tylers still got it . . . [She] is a master at creating clans; at crafting groups of diverse characters who nonetheless belong together, who seem vulnerable and honest and real . . . I couldn't put A Spool of Blue Thread down. Seattle Times The extraordinary thing about all her writing is the extent to which she makes one believe every word, deed, and breath. A Spool of Blue Thread is no exception. [It keeps] one as absorbed as if it were ones own family she were describing, and as if what happened to them were necessary reading . . . What she has that neither Marilynne Robinson nor Alice Munro possess to the same degree is an irrepressible sense of the comedy beneath even the most melancholy surface . . . Such a joy. The Guardian Deeply moving . . . A Spool of Blue Thread is a miracle of sorts, a tender, touching and funny story about three generations of an ordinary American family who are, of course, anything but . . . Tylers accomplishment in this understated masterpiece is to convince us not only that the Whitshanks are remarkable but also that every family no matter how seemingly ordinary is in its own way special. Associated Press Tylers genius as a novelist involves her ability to withhold moral judgment of her characters. Tyler trusts the reader to decide . . . tightly written and highly readable . . . Tyler employs dark humor wonderfully . . . Thoughtful and intriguing. Boston Globe Absorbing and deeply satisfying. Entertainment Weekly For half a century, Anne Tyler has been doing something similar [to mile Zola], building up a cast of characters, turning in to yet another Baltimore lane, forming a composite picture of American life from Roosevelt to Obama . . . Tylers comic naturalism uses the family of today as a way of getting inside the ordinary, in the sense not of bland but of universal. New Statesman Have you ever worried that one of your most favorite authors might disappoint you with a new novel? Well, fear not. Anne Tyler delivers all you expect and more in her latest . . . A truly authentic look at modern day American families . . . Piercing. Huffington Post The master delivers, again. (Like youre surprised.) . . . Moving and resonant . . . This novel is as clever and compelling as her best work. Bustle You legion of lovers of Anne Tyler are going to get this new novel of hers and love it, too . . . With this novel, as with her others, its easy to underestimate or simply miss the art that looks and feels so much like life which is, after all the essence of Anne Tylers art and, like life, never easy at its best. Minneapolis Star-Tribune Tyler has constructed the character of Abby with all the care to rival some of her best previous characters from her 50 years of writing . . . When you reach the last page of the book, you hope the author has the first draft of another book about the same people already written. There's a good chance you'll feel this way about the Whitshank family. Pittsburgh Post-Gazette Tylers novels have won a legion of fans. And they will not be disappointed by A Spool of Blue Thread . . . As Tyler delves further into her creations psyches, she ratchets up to familial drama, and she does so with prose that occasionally soars from the page and stops the readers breath . . . A humane and moving novel. Richmond Times-Dispatch Tyler tenderly unwinds the tangled skeins of three generations, then knits them together . . . in precise often hilarious detail . . . By the end of this deeply beguiling novel, we come to know a reality entirely different from the one at the start. Not that anyones lying, only that everything the way we see the world and the way we understand it to work is changed by the intimate, incremental shifts of daily life. O magazine Tyler slyly dismantles the myth-making behind all our family stories . . . She does so with a compassion that recognizes that few of us will be immune to similar accommodations with the truth . . . The novel [makes] piercing forays into the long-distant past . . . We are not reading the fiction of estrangement, or of disorientation, but its power derives from the restless depths beneath its unfractured surface. The Guardian Exploring this dichotomy the imperfections that reside within a polished exterior is Tylers specialty, and her latest generation-spanning work accomplishes just that, masterfully and monumentally . . . Indelible. Elle This book is about love and the tensions that bind us . . . Focused, wholly audacious and damn good." Gawker Tyler show[s] once again that shes a gifted and engrossing storyteller. Publishers Weekly Probably the best novel you will read all year . . . A fine, secretly well-crafted, utterly absorbing, and compelling new addition to the Tyler canon . . . Lovely, funny, tragic, and at times almost unbearably poignant. Chicago Tribune By my count Ive now reviewed around 50 books for USA Today. Ive never given

any of them four stars until today: to *A Spool of Blue Thread*, the masterful 20th novel by Anne Tyler . . . *A Spool of Blue Thread* is a flight forward . . . Akin to the enigmatic Alice Munro, or, if you prefer, a direct influence on Jonathan Franzen. USA Today Tolstoy isn't the only novelist to have noticed that happy families are happy in the same way. In our time, Anne Tyler makes this observation with more generosity of spirit and humor than Tolstoy ever showed . . . Here's an author who, after fifty years of writing, continues at the top of her game. With prose so polished it practically glows on the page, she makes fiction writing seem like an effortless enterprise. Houston Chronicle *A Spool of Blue Thread* showcases Tyler's knack for capturing thoughts and feelings unsparingly and sympathetically . . . The novel is filled with authentic and memorable moments. Philadelphia Inquirer Sitting down with an Anne Tyler novel is not unlike taking your place at Thanksgiving dinner . . . The story of any family is told through the prism of time. And no storyteller compares to Tyler when it comes to unspooling those tales. St. Louis Post-Dispatch The sort of novel that's hard to disentangle yourself from . . . Warm, charming and emotionally radiant, *A Spool of Blue Thread* surely must be counted as among Tyler's best . . . Even the closest family has secrets, and Tyler reveals them in a satisfying and moving way . . . That's more than 50 years of producing luminous, comic, heartbreaking fiction . . . Here's hoping for more of her wise, wonderful words. Miami Herald Thematically similar to *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* in many ways, *A Spool of Blue Thread* delivers plenty of situational comedy. But it's also incisive in exploring how families work and don't. Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel What a wonderful, natural writer she is . . . She knows all the secrets of the human heart. Monica Ali, author of *Brick Lane* Anne Tyler is one of my favourite writers and this is a delicious book. It is like being with a dear old friend. It is very special. Rachel Joyce, author of *The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry*. . . Tyler is as fleet and graceful as a skater, her prose as transparent as ice . . . We get swept up in the spin of conversations, the slipstream of consciousness, and the glide and dip of domestic life, then feel the sting of Tyler's quick and cutting insights into unjust assumptions about class, gender, age, and race . . . Tyler's long dedication to language and story [is] an artistic practice made perfect in this charming, funny, and shrewd novel of the paradoxes of self, family, and home. Donna Seaman, Booklist (starred) Tyler gives us lovely insights into an ordinary family who, like most families . . . imagined they were special. They will be special to readers thanks to the extraordinary richness and delicacy with which Tyler limns complex interactions and mixed feelings familiar to us all and yet marvelously particular to the empathetically rendered members of the Whitshank clan. The texture of everyday experience transmuted into art . . . Family life in Baltimore [is] still a fresh and compelling subject in the hands of this gifted veteran. Kirkus (starred) s from the UK: [Tyler's] extraordinary gift for producing what seems less like fiction than actuality works wonders again. Characters all but elbow their way off the page with lifelikeness . . . Masterly . . . Magnificent . . . A gleamingly accomplished book. Peter Kemp, The Sunday Times A glorious treat for her loyal and attentive readers . . . As accomplished as her Pulitzer Prize-winning *Breathing Lessons*, it is the best novel Tyler has published in decades . . . It is a masterclass of restrained writing, lightened with gentle comedy and pitch-perfect dialogue . . . The complex narrative has more layers than Merrick Whitshank's wedding cake. The Independent She has given us plenty of reminders of her lavish strengths: the quiet authority of her prose; the ultimately persuasive belief that a kindly eye is not necessarily a dishonest one; and perhaps above all, the fact that, 50 years after she started, she still gives us a better sense than almost anyone else of what it's like to be alive. The Sunday Telegraph *A Spool of Blue Thread* may be her best yet . . . Anne Tyler leaves me thrilled and baffled by her genius . . . How does she do it? . . . Her books are somehow more gripping than the paciest transcontinental thriller . . . I know of no other novelist who draws so directly from real life, and whose work remains so uncontaminated by the shortcuts and clichés of television and Hollywood. Mail on Sunday I've been reading Anne Tyler novels for more than 20 years and she has never let me down . . . Tyler has the remarkable gift of laying bare the ordinariness of family life and thereby turning it into something extraordinary. Scratch beneath the surface and most families are dysfunctional and this is what Tyler evokes time and time again with mesmerizing power . . . Read this and you won't be disappointed . . . Engrossing. Vanessa Berridge, Express It is wonderful to pick up a novel from a bonafide literary superstar. *A Spool of Blue Thread* is Anne Tyler's twentieth novel and it shows in every flawless sentence . . . A stunning novel about family life which just rings so true it depicts the bonds and the tensions, the love and the exasperation beautifully . . . A terrific novel. The Bookseller, UK (Book of the Month)