



Everything You Need

A.L. Kennedy

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From the prodigiously talented A. L. Kennedy comes a flamboyantly stylish and fiercely emotional novel about fathers and daughters, creation and self-destruction, and love's paradoxical power to heal its most devastated victims. One such victim is Nathan Staples, a writer whose hilarious contempt for humanity is surpassed only by his corrosive self-loathing. Along with five equally dysfunctional colleagues Nathan lives on an island retreat off the coast of Wales, where he yearns for the daughter he lost years before. Now, in defiance of all his hopes, Mary Lamb—herself an aspiring writer—is about to join him as the seventh member of the colony.

As Nathan tortuously wins the trust of the child who has no inkling of their true relationship, Mary comes to a gradual understanding of her gift. In **Everything You Need**, A. L. Kennedy combines the mythic resonance of Arthurian legend with a sensibility as lyrical as it is profane.

Everything You Need Details

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Author : A.L. Kennedy

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From Reader Review Everything You Need for online ebook

Tony says

Just tell her. Tell your daughter she's your daughter. Tell her you're her father. How hard is that? Just tell her.

JUST.TELL.HER.

She was four when your wife told you goodbye and took her. And don't follow, she said, or else. *Or else* being *that* allegation. But you didn't do *that* and it doesn't seem you took the threat seriously. So you didn't follow. Not even just a few years later when your wife abandons your daughter to her gay brother and his lover - the Uncles. Surely then you could have asserted a right. Instead, you wait on a little island - an island where you are one of seven writers. It's quiet there. And home to an odd literary inspiration. Instead of having affairs or driving in traffic or talking to someone with a real job, instead of, you know, real life, you and the others attempt suicide: hanging yourself, swimming with sharks, that sort of thing. You never succeed, the point being to come real close.

It is to this island that you contrive to bring your daughter, who now aspires to be a writer. You award her a Fellowship. She comes. To be mentored by you. This would be a good time to tell her, sometime in the seven years she's there. You do not tell her. You almost kill your dog in yet another suicide attempt. But you don't tell your daughter she's your daughter.

It would have been, I firmly believe, a wonderful conversation, because this book is full of great conversations. And, not counting the dog, there are three great characters, but with *but*s.

The Uncles are superb. . . *but* after showing us how wonderful they are, we are then *told*, over and over and over again, how wonderful they are. And your drunken but intelligent, articulate, funny editor is a superb character. . . *but* was it really necessary for him to go to a gay dominant to get an enema and a tooth pulled, other than the author's well-known need to shock?

I liked this book, even if I don't sound like I liked this book. But I feel used.

Ron Charles says

How quietly, how quickly A.L. Kennedy has taken a place in the pantheon of contemporary novelists. In America, she remains something of a treasured secret, but in Britain, this 36-year-old Scottish woman has already racked up a half dozen impressive awards. She's even served as a juror for the Booker Prize.

Her latest novel, "Everything You Need," is unlikely to change her position on this side of the Atlantic. It's marvelous and horrendous, full of extraordinary insight and sensitivity, but burdened with enough depravity to repel the larger audience she would otherwise attract.

This strikingly odd story revolves around two related activities: writing and parenting, sources of mingled pleasure and despair for Nathan Staples. We meet him during a bungled suicide attempt, a calamity that leaves him depressed and rope-burned. He's a misanthropic pulp novelist, who hasn't written anything good

since his wife ran off and took their little girl 15 years ago.

Despite his episode with the noose, he's finally figured out a way to see his daughter, and possibly even be a parent again. Mary Lamb is now 19 and an aspiring writer. She thinks her father died long ago, but Nathan has secretly arranged for her to win a seven-year scholarship to study on Foal Island, a writer's colony off the coast of Wales.

This commune is one of the many marvels that fans relish about Kennedy's inventive fiction. The Foal Island Fellowship floats just shy of ludicrous. Nathan and six other strange writers live on their "rain-asphyxiated" island alone, enduring each other and the equally unpredictable weather.

Their gentle leader encourages them in a vaguely defined mystical tradition that involves "facing extreme risk" seven times. They scoff at his quirky idealism even while engineering brutal acts of self-destruction. (Mary stays in the house of a past member who cut off his head and hands with a circular saw.)

These tortured souls wear the scars of a writer's life on their sleeves - and minds and bodies. They're people who understand Red Smith's famous observation that "writing is easy. Just sit down at the typewriter and open a vein."

They come together for monthly business meetings marked by the kind of profane acrimony only professional writers (or smart sailors) could articulate. But after each bruising battle, they retire for Quaker-like sessions of communal meditation.

It's difficult to imagine why a normal 19-year-old woman would leave her loved ones for seven years to study with this group of grotesque misfits. And it's difficult to imagine why Nathan tutors his daughter for seven years without getting up the courage to tell her who he is. But that's why we need a novelist as good as Kennedy to imagine these wonderful things for us.

Mary Lamb's seven years pass in a leisurely series of anecdotes and conversations over more than 500 pages that are hilarious except when they're heart-breaking. Kennedy writes in a syncopated style that's perpetually surprising, mingling her own voice with the internal and spoken voices of her characters. (Even Nathan's big-hearted dog jumps into the mix now and then.) This is a novelist of extraordinary emotional breadth, as willing to be sweet and sentimental as she is to be coarse and repellent.

While Mary struggles under her father's alternatively irascible and affectionate instruction, we read selected chapters from his autobiography, a secret labor of love that illustrates his failings as a parent and implicitly begs for forgiveness. Kennedy celebrates fatherhood in all its wonder, but she can also clear your head with the blank terror of loving a child so much.

Early in her sojourn on the island, one of the writers tells Mary, "You are willing and - if you think about it - volunteering yourself to take charge of the medium that governs and lies, that defines and dreams and prays, that witnesses truth and condemns to death. And, naturally, such a large thing will take charge of you. It will give you appetites you've never known."

Nathan knows the cost of devoting one's life to writing, a craft that simultaneously cures and exacerbates loneliness. Seeing his daughter lit with the same passion and beginning to make the same sacrifices excites his pride and frightens him. His Zen-like writing advice is pretty thin (Rule #3: Disregard all praise and criticism), but as a story about a life of words, "Everything You Need" is literally everything you need.

The publishing industry receives a particularly brutal rebuke from J.D. Grace, Nathan's droll and "forensically compelling" editor in London. He's a repulsive character, dying from a host of illnesses and self-inflicted wounds. The despair he feels about the poor condition of publishing reflects in his own

increasingly depraved behavior, rendered here in shockingly explicit detail.

Such is Kennedy's thematic universe, an utterly original mixture of wit and tragedy, ordinary and bizarre, outrageous and sweet. That's enough.

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2001/0719/p1...>

Stephen Durrant says

I add here a second book from the much-acclaimed Scottish writer A.L. Kennedy. This novel, like *Original Bliss* (see below), exemplifies Kennedy's trademark mixture of tenderness and something just this side of pornography. The plot is a bit too complicated to summarize briefly. Basically, Kennedy deals here with two themes: writers and the neuroses that both motivate and hinder (destroy?) them, and the relationship between fathers and daughters. The underlying premise of the second of these themes is a bit hard to swallow (a father was estranged from his daughter when she was very young and then establishes a close relationship with her much later without her knowing he is her father and this relationship lasts for years without her finding out the truth that everyone around her seems to know), it does allow Kennedy to explore the complexities of feelings that can exist between a father and a daughter, particularly when the daughter is the very image of a lost and much-loved wife. There is considerable warmth and passion in this story although the novel's obsession with writers and their traumas could be viewed as a bit too much navel gazing--but writers DO like to stare at their own navels! In the final analysis, though, I must raise an issue here that will surely get me excommunicated from any fellowship of serious readers. This book is 550 pages long, requiring a slow reader like me around fifteen hours to complete. Let's arbitrarily say that this book brought me ten "enjoyment points." That would be .67 points per hour. Now let's assume that a smaller book took me eight hours to complete and brought only six points. That would be .75 points per hour. Which would be the best investment of my readerly time? I can hear the protests, "How crude! Importing a productivity model into something as sacred as reading!" Well, damn it, I'm in Singapore as I write this and everything here is about productivity. How could the spirit of this place not infect me? My final judgment remains that this book is just too large and contains a fair number of unnecessary pages. Maybe Kennedy would justify the latter by saying that obsessions, such as preoccupy the central character in this book, need to be repeated over and over again for the sake of verisimilitude. Maybe, but "at my back I always hear times winged chariot drawing near."

Holly says

Fledgling writer Mary Lamb joins Nathan Staples and other writers at a remote writers colony. Unbeknownst to Mary (and only Mary) Nathan is her estranged father who is still wildly in love, after decades apart, w/ Mary's mother. The original writer's colony members have a pact w/ death - if they escape death seven times, they find fulfillment, and the actual escape reconfirms that life is still beautiful.

Kennedy is an excellent writer, but this effort was too long. The writers continue to attempt to die (or avoid death?), and Nathan continues to struggle w/ his relationship w/ Mary. However, the beautiful characterization and imagery and Kennedy's ability to surprise long into a story make this a worthwhile effort.

Terry Pearce says

I would've liked to read this without the italic internal thought... it often seemed too much, like hammering home points her prose and her story was doing well enough anyway. The characters and the basic story were well done, though, even if there could have been a bit less untimely-death-based drama -- the most compelling stuff was the stuff that had to do with the timely deaths and the lives of the characters. I think this might have been a four-star book if had been edited down to a little over half its length.

Carla Stafford says

Everything You Need, by A.L. Kennedy is my personal favorite of the three books I have read by her to date. I have mentioned before that she has a cutting, poignant, unique, and sometimes cryptic voice. Everything You Need is no exception.

The central character of this novel is Nathan Staples. Nathan is a writer of gruesomely titillating crime novels, a lost soul who detests most all of humanity-himself most of all. He resides on a little island with other writers who periodically take "steps" (aka near death experiences) to renew their commitment to and their passion for the written word. Nathan's island home brought to my mind the Island of Misfit Toys. Joe, the godlike founder and overseer of this tragic little writing community holds Sunday "family" dinners in his light house with his broken adopted family of misfit authors. Like a good father, Joe guides them all, knows them well, protects them, and has stores of compassion for their broken lives and shattered hearts. He also possesses a clandestine, divine like presence that borders on creepiness. If not for Joe's moments of transparency and tenderness- Joe's ability to seemingly read minds and bring people back to life-to cast himself as a character in the dreams of others-may be a pinch off putting.

For Nathan, Joe has agreed to and arranged for Nathan's estranged daughter Mary Lamb, an aspiring young writer to join his Island of Misfit Authors. Mary believes her father to be deceased. Nathan is assigned as Mary's mentor. As a reader, I felt myself holding my breath, clenching my fists, laughing, and weeping-as a neurotic Nathan who very much adores his never forgotten daughter, manages to provide Mary with an unflinching love that he himself has never known. I savored the nuances of Kennedy's writing, that showed rather than told of the deep loyalty, intimate knowledge, and dedicated love Mary is able to form for the self deprecating, complex man that she doesn't know is her father.

Dark, funny, tragic, heart wrenching, twisty-and altogether lovely-in the ugly-pretty way that life often is. Everything You Need is-well, everything you need in a novel.

"Nathan only wanted to be left alone. And also he wanted to never be left alone again. And he wanted to be loved by those he loved and to be set free from them, every one. And he wanted to be able to love those he loved and able to hate them, too. And he wanted to rest at ease in his skin and in his time and place, while he wished to abandon them completely and be gone. And he wanted to die of wanting and he wanted to be properly alive. And he wanted to be thought of fondly and never to be thought of at all. "

A.L. Kennedy-Everything You Need

Laura says

I love this book. I'm not very good at reviews, so I'll just write down the things I love about it. First of all, I love the way it's written. Kennedy has a unique writing style that I've never experienced before. The words flow very smoothly and very naturally. It almost seemed to me that this style is reflecting the atmosphere of the island - a calm, monotonic atmosphere that is keeping the secrets of its inhabitants. It was very easy to read and none of the 500 pages felt forced or boring. I could read 500 or even more pages of this story. Secondly, I love the surrealism that is yet very realistic. Let's agree, some of the scenes are quite disturbing and macabre and some of the situations seem far-fetched. However, this is exactly what makes them realistic, because as we all know, truth can be stranger than fiction ;). Thirdly, this is a beautiful story overall. It's not all sunshine and butterflies, but it still is a happy story. This book shows life as it is: not just black, not just white, but extremely colorful, with death and separations of beloved ones, with the achieving of one's dreams, with bizarre out-of-this-world situations. And in the end, there is no end. The story goes on beyond the last page. Overall, I think this novel just celebrates life and that's what I love most about it.

Katie says

Do I just not get it because I'm not British/Welsh/Scottish? Sorry.

This was my first exposure to A.L. Kennedy. Of all things, I was swayed to read this by the cover, the fact that I love a good long book, and the blurb on top that declares that if you're "at all interested in contemporary fiction," you can't miss this novel. I slugged all the way through — once you're invested, you do really want Nathan Staples to tell his daughter that he's her father — but by the end was just sort of disgusted by the characters. Not one of them seemed likeable; everyone is a sad sack. Particularly Nathan, whose self-absorption never lets up in a whole 545 pages. No character arc, no betterment, just repetitive self-pity. I wonder if I'd have liked it better if I didn't mind constant italicized thought paragraphs, which are prevalent and which I find inelegant. Ironically this book is about the struggle of writing and crafting perfect sentences... I found it to have been quite the struggle.

Samantha says

I wasn't sure at first whether to be taken in or put off by what seems like this book's self-conscious strangeness. A writers' colony where the members cultivate near-death experiences as a means of getting closer to their craft, a father who maneuvers to bring his long-estranged daughter (who is unaware of his identity) to said colony, lots of flashes of (mostly imagined) gore, and an aging and foulmouthed editor drinking himself to death--at times it approaches marvelous, Pippi-Longstocking-for-adults strangeness and at others it simply strains credibility.

But maybe credibility isn't everything. Nathan Staples, physically ailing and creatively stalled, arranges for his 19-year-old daughter, Mary Lamb, to become the newest member of the colony on Foal Island. He and the small group of mostly misfit writers in residence there live, work, snipe, and from time to time apparently try to kill themselves. They're seeking a kind of creative liberation, not death, though sometimes the line between the two is blurred. Mary arrives lacking in much life experience but already seeming rather grounded and self-possessed. Nathan bungles his first impression on her and subsequently stalls on revealing to her that he is her father. He's hardly an ideal father figure: he confuses his obsessiveness with his genuine love (in which he's not utterly lacking) and he is oblivious to his often controlling nature. He and Mary

develop a successful, if frequently strained, relationship as mentor and protegee, and over time Mary becomes increasingly poised for actual literary success. But will Nathan ever simply tell Mary the truth? His self-loathing and general social ineptitude lead him into decisions that will only make his task harder, and often result in darkly comic episodes (as in the encounter with the island's resident nymphomaniac.)

I enjoyed this book, though it sometimes conveyed the impression of being two or three books at once. Kennedy's sensibility is somewhat odd, which isn't a problem on its own, but my engagement with it waxed and waned. Some of the black humor was wonderful, and the swearing (particularly by the alcoholic editor) bordered on contagious. It made American cursing seem amateurish by comparison. However, the plot threads could have come together a little better. I left it feeling a little disappointed, but still thinking and rethinking my overall impression.

Roderick Hart says

If you believed the reviews you would conclude that this book is the best thing since sliced bread. It's the third of Kennedy's novels I have read and I have been methodical enough to read them in chronological order. I have noticed two things. Each one is longer than the last. The first seemed more autobiographical than the later ones, though I have no way of proving that. The second was least based on the author's own experiences, since she could not have been a tail gunner in a Lancaster bomber during World War Two. And the third, since it deals with writers and writing, is again closer to the writer's experience, though that does not mean it is autobiographical. But despite their many differences each deals with people who have trouble with their emotions and, as a result, are often inarticulate, failing to rise to the verbal occasion and resorting to small-talk or silence as a way out.

While there were good reasons for Day (in the novel of that name) to be tongue-tied, the 'hero' of this book, Jonathan Staples is a novelist, a word-smith who ought to be able to communicate with others better than he does. But he has a problem. He still loves the wife who had called time on their marriage many years before and, in so doing, deprived him of their daughter by telling her he is dead. He now lives on Foal Island, a writer's retreat, where his daughter comes to improve her writing skills with her own father as her tutor, a fact of which she is unaware. He should tell her but years pass and he does not. The implication is that the manuscript he gives her to read at the end of the book will do his talking for him.

After his separation from his wife, Jonathan Staples turns to crime writing, so there are passing references to violent acts typical of the genre. But at heart he is a writer of literary fiction which his editor, J D Grace, encourages him to take up again. As it happens this same editor, following his inclination for submission, allows a dominant male (literally) to remove his molars one by one in payment for BDSM sessions. And the fact that Staples writes crime novels opens the door to a question: is literary fiction intrinsically superior to genre fiction? Is the Booker Prize a better guide to quality than the Golden Dagger? I believe the answer is no, though it easy to find bad examples in each category. In the UK alone, 600 crime novels are published each year, so many will be run-of-the-mill. But the best crime writers report a good deal about society and how the mind works, and a select few use language every bit as well as their literary equivalents.

I found this literary novel tedious for several reasons. Jonathan Staples is a romantic so, like Polynesians faced with Romeo and Juliet, I find both his emotions and behaviour ridiculous. The second concerns the frequent references to writers and writing as if we were dealing with an aspect of religion rather than a craft. The third concerns sex. If I wanted to read a manual on biological plumbing I could choose to do so though, to be fair, there are more references to it than actual occurrences. On the plus side, the book is improved by a likeable dog.

Abailart says

You take an island, always a good start. With its sedges and history of localised resentments and furies, loves and losses. You make the inhabitants writers. You bring to the community a young and talented woman with a passion and flair for writing. You make her mentor the father who she does not know is her father. You explore the inside of father and daughter, the inside of their exploring each other, and the confusion of relationships around them including the past relationships, and the cell membrane that lets in stuff from the world beyond the island. You focus on the nature of writing. You focus on the eroticism of writing and minds. You see how close fathers and daughters are to needing a desert island to work it all out. And you add the finest of writing, from the finest of contemporary Scottish writers, Alison Kennedy. You have Everything You Need.

Jonfaith says

Jesus, this wounded mess is indeed perfect for the heartbroken, the shattered, those that sup on debris and mourn the light. Amazing chunks and weaves of this novel remain intact eleven years later, an amazing feat. Kennedy is both personal and palpable, ultimately relentless, her characters you empathize with to the horizons of self-mutilation and abnegation. This novel is laden with resounding slaps and warm, musky hugs.

Jayant Maini says

This is a brilliant book.....excellent.....!!!! It has captured the complexity of the human nature brilliantly.....!!!! The protagonist is brittle...frail.....but he is impactful.....his inner contradictions.....are the highlight of the story. But I feel the main theme as has been correctly pointed by a number of reviewers is that of pain.....physical agony....the mental pain.....and it seems like hell.....!!! His love for his daughter is real and at times it is so painful.....that you feel it.....!!! It is poignant piece of work.....and astonishing.

Effie says

every sentence that a.l kennedy writes is as dense as a dark, bitter-sweet chocolate fudge cake... every word is there for a reason... this one is about writing, love, hate, death and loneliness, landscape and one that i will read and re-read.

Amy says

Fairly straightforward novel about a writer's colony where one man is trying to reveal that he is the father to his daughter, another writer on the island. He struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts. Both father and daughter suffer from heartbreak, but come to appreciate each other's company.
