



Some Fun

Antonya Nelson

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One of the most award-winning, critically acclaimed story writers working today, Antonya Nelson has a list of accolades that is astonishing for any writer, but especially for one as young as she. With her newest collection, Nelson once again proves herself worthy of her stellar reputation, delivering seven taut, striking stories and a brilliant novella, all exploring the tensions of troubled family relations. Nelson is an extraordinary chronicler of the fraught relationships between parents and children and husbands and wives. With her particular understanding of the threats and vulnerabilities of wild adolescence, as well as the complicated, persistent love that often lies dormant beneath the drama of rebellion, she illuminates the hidden corners of her characters' lives.

The shy, shoplifting sixteen-year-old protagonist in the title novella is trying to understand how to become an adult while going through a year of family disaster. We watch as she dabbles in the same adult behaviors that so repulse her about her parents (binge drinking, sex) while maintaining so much of her adolescent insecurity and confusion. "Dick" is a moving story about a mother who, having lost her daughter to the vicissitudes of adolescence, has a compulsion to protect her innocent, preadolescent son from the aggressive and encroaching post-9/11 adult world. The homeless teen at the heart of "Eminent Domain" is a pampered Houston rich girl who has, for her own reasons, taken to the streets.

Radiating an emotional intensity that unifies the entire collection, each of Nelson's stories both captivates and unnerves. As her characters run the gauntlet of often bewildering family tensions and trauma, she alternates hope and despair, resentment and love, in perfectly recognizable proportions.

Weaving wonderful observation with quick wit and striking insight, "Some Fun" is a timely and provocative inventory of the state of family in America -- and proof of why Nelson is one of the most important writers at work today.

Some Fun Details

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Author : Antonya Nelson

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From Reader Review Some Fun for online ebook

Deidre says

Antonya Nelson. *Some Fun*. New York: Scribner, 2006.

Nelson's stories have characters that are similar. Many are heavy drinkers, who are happiest when they are drunk. Most of the main characters are women and they too are drinkers, who cheat on their husbands and shoplifted successfully when they were young. Curious, huh? They also have flawed, working class brothers who protect them and drink with them. Nelson writes about sad, incomplete women and the tension among social classes. (See page 13, "Dick," as an example of how she contrasts social classes.) I can't think of a story that ends happily.

The first three stories focus on boys, sons.

- "Dick" a mother takes her son, Cole, away from his best friend, Dick, by moving from LA to a remote area in Colorado. The mother centers on her son, doesn't much like her daughter, and plans on leaving her husband when the son goes away to college.

- "Strike Anywhere" is about a son who has to wait in his dad's pickup truck while he goes off the wagon. The mother and daughter are waiting for them to return from the store so they can celebrate the father's sobriety for the last few months.

- And "Flesh Tones" is about a son, whose mother dies, but the son still feels his mother is with him until he has sex with a girl in college.

For a depressing writer, her stories are compelling and I truly like how she pulls me in and holds me there. Her metaphors are good like when the main character, a women (Julia) who is cheating on her husband, describes the impact the death of her husband's brother had on her husband's life and then, in turn, her life.

"The brother had been only seventeen when he died, ten years before Julia and Teddy met. He was therefore a ghost to Julia, dead without her having known him, haunting her life nonetheless. Not unhelpfully, she thought. If he hadn't lost his brother, Teddy wouldn't be who he was, and Julia never would have met or fallen in love with him. This ghost, named Billy, accounted for Teddy's character, for choices he'd made, for people he'd befriended, for places he'd gone, for the man he'd become." (107)

Good metaphor: "She was interested in what would happen next, but it wasn't a tragedy, just a glitch. A wall had popped up in front of them, like a piece of toast, like a warning shot, like a love affair. That was all." (107)

Frances says

I read Antonya Nelson's short story collection "Female Troubles" five or so years ago and was immediately enraptured. Part of this had something to do with the title, which I thought incredibly clever. And then there was her distinct narrative voice. It has a decidedly female tone to it, as well as an edge that is unmistakably Southwestern. The people she uncovers in her stories and the manner in which she does so, is particular to their location.

Her collection and novella from 2006, "Some Fun," slices through run-of-the-mill domesticity. Nelson exhibits a particular interest in the relationships between parents and their children. Often her stories zero in

on the dynamics between a mother and her son. She spends less time on these familial bonds once the children have aged, preferring to focus on the attachments created in the childhoods of her subjects. Happily there is nothing sinister in Nelson's exploration of these connections. She probes the intricacies of relationships that are merely the result of plain old paternal and maternal love.

These relationships, as we quickly discover, are fraught with a smorgasborg of issues, which Nelson expertly draws out. There is abandonment, protection, and fear to be wrestled with, as well as difficult and shifting dynamics of power within the familial unit. Nelson examines the factors and tensions that sway the balance of authority in a family, whether it be age, mental health or the presence of a person who exists outside of the domestic sphere and threatens to disturb if not destroy it. Nelson, one feels, speaks the stories of the people one might run into at the grocery store but whose full lives are never revealed.

Nelson refuses to let her characters off easily. They confront situations that push their beliefs, sense of propriety, and security, to the limits. Rarely do they return unaltered. Nelson recognizes and allows for the ugliness in people. She brings these darker facets to light without forcing anyone's hand or putting them on trial. This is an author who is not particularly gentle with her characters but neither is she harsh. It is easy to keep pace with their turns in mood. Their intentions can always be grasped from one angle, even if their actions are somewhat off the mark.

The love stories that appear in this collection concern the kind of love that isn't chosen. The relationships that are unwound for the reader depict the depths and weaknesses of familial love. Nelson understands and embraces the fact that the love between parents and their children is both wonderfully exquisite as well as the pits of misery.

The most important thing I learned my first year of college was unpacked for me in a poetry class. It had to do with the desolate realization in adolescence that your parents' love is incomparable. This is, of course, coupled with the discovery that you desire a different sort of love that they cannot provide and that most people in the world won't. Meaning, that as much as you might love the world, very little of it will love you back. This concept struck a chord, caused romantic little me to burst into tears and I have been unable to shake the truth of it. Nelson encapsulates this certainty in her characters' relationships. Mothers yearn to forever protect their sons, and daughters are at a loss when they see their fathers slipping from them. It's impossible to maintain a perfect closeness. But what is preserved and exposed by Nelson's stories is the intrinsic depths of this unchosen love and its undeniable intensity.

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Debbie says

Antonya Nelson's writing is wise, lyrical and honest. I think she does her best with troubled adolescents and teens. The troubled adult stories with all the adultery and such are good, but not as terrific as her look into the world of troubled youth. She just nails it there. The problem with the adultery stories is probably me, because I have read so many of them, and while she offers her usual wit and complex take on affairs of the heart and mind, at times they can be a bit too ponderous. I wonder if she is overly ponderous in order to attempt to separate herself from the vast pool of like minded stories.

But when she does the kid, put away distractions, because you will not be able to leave these stories. She can step into teens' heads with compassion, honesty, whilst never taking the moral high ground. "Flesh Tone" which deals with a boy's obsessive longing for his dead mother rings so true it is painful to read. You love this mother who stands by his side, a ghost in his head. You understand why, despite her flaws, he is so

attached to her. This part of his brain takes on life, and becomes a character. You wonder how she does it, this journey into a teenage mind. Brilliant story. Although I did think her end was a bit too nicely tied up and came across like a mother peeking into the story. Which is OK and was rather sweet and ironic. It's what a mother would perhaps write to end it, and quite appropriate given what the story is about--the impact a mother has eternally upon a child.

But the overall best story is saved for last--"Some Fun," her novella. This story reminded me of "The Point" by Charles D'Ambrosio, another story of a child who takes care of his child-like drunk mother and friends. "Some Fun" uses the same kind of idea to reveal the misery of alcoholism and its impact upon the children. We see the drunk through the eyes of the adult who simply happens to be a kid. Nelson manages to reveal a very complex love by analyzing how this daughter feels about her father who leaves and takes up with a sober more responsible woman. Eventually all the kids join him except this daughter who stays to take care of her funny, yet drunk mom. The child sees her father as a coward, taking the easy way out. And is the mother brave? Is this child of an alcoholic brave? Who is brave? It is a long story about the child of an alcoholic, in grand detail. All the emotion and dysfunction laid right out. Tremendously well done and important.

Very good collection. If you don't have time for the whole thing, start with the last story, one that to me should not be missed.

Lisa says

I've admired Nelson's writing for some time--usually as part of "best of" short story collections. The effect is different when her stories are grouped together. I feel like she is exploring certain themes and hasn't reached closure on this exploration yet. Here they are:

- * Family member (sometimes the narrator) with a drinking/drug problem
- * Family members helping other family members with drinking/drug problems
- * Adultery
- * Pregnant women drinking
- * Motherhood

This is vastly oversimplifying her work in this book. Her writing is excellent, not overly sentimental, and I think she nails these characters much of the time. But be prepared to see certain tropes appear again and again in this book. It reminds me of painters who keep painting the same thing over and over again, trying to get it right.

Kelly says

i finally finished a book. the puppy makes my attention span about th--

Beth says

I discovered Antonya Nelson in a recent fiction piece in The New Yorker. When I saw good reviews from Raymond Carver, Dave Eggers, and Michael Chabon, on the book jacket I knew I was in for a treat. I would almost give it four stars because I think her prose is stunningly sharp and her characters' insights so real you

can feel them exactly as you might yourself, but often the stories ended with an odd feeling (sometimes a really interesting odd feeling, but often a sense of, "and then...?"). Yes, I know this is typical for many short stories, but it felt especially so in hers.

1.1 says

Great stuff but I found it just a little bit samey – even the novella was of a piece thematically with the short stories – not that that's a bad thing in this situation, since Nelson writes very well, all of the stories are nuanced, packed with interesting details and fantastic characters, and memorable. 'Flesh Tone' stood out as particularly fine - a little bit dark and interesting but also subdued. I suppose all the stories herein could be called subdued, with emphasis on realism, on the emotional journeys of the characters, that sort of thing which is very calm and earnest. If you appreciate short stories, you'll enjoy this collection. The front cover is perhaps just a little bit boastful, hopefully in a playful way.

Beth says

Oh my god! Being a short story fanatic, I cannot believe that I am just now finding Antonya Nelson. Her themes seem to be the difficulties inherent in navigating adolescence and in maintaining connections with other people (particularly family). She reminds me a little of Roxana Robinson, but with more alcohol.

Nikki Morse says

I used to think of short stories as good for when you aren't reading much and put books down for long enough that you forget the story and characters. Antonya Nelson's work is what taught me they can be so much more, and a rich form of their own. I read *Female Troubles* almost a decade ago, and haven't loved her novels that I've read since. *Some Fun* reminded me why - she's most brilliant with quick, incisive, devastating stories. I don't always like her characters as people - they're often cheaters, addicts, people who harm others - which is maybe why I am glad to not spend an entire book with them. But even when I don't like them, I love them - her wit and understanding about their alienation and brokenness makes their failures universal even when they are extreme.

Keelan says

Read the title story/novella, "Some Fun", for the Pennington Library's Too-Busy-for-Books book club in October. A compelling story about a teenage daughter's struggle to keep her life and family together in the face of her parents' divorce and her mother's alcoholism. It takes place in El Paso, Texas, and several aspects of the plot deal with the plight of immigrants in this border town. Despite being well-written, I didn't find myself enjoying the story or really desiring to find out what happened next; hence only three stars.

Melanie says

Increasingly I would say Antonya Nelson is one of my favorite short story writers. I thought this book was her best yet. The stories, most of which are about female characters about to self-destruct, have this dark and lyrical and incantatory (if that's not a word I just invented it) quality that reminds me weirdly of the best of Denis Johnson. But they also are so character-driven and create entire worlds, like a dysfunctional and substance-abusing Alice Munro. My favorites in this collection were (helpfully) one story whose name I forgot, which I first read in the New Yorker, and another one I think called Rear Window, which is told in reverse, but not in a gimmicky way (OK, maybe a little gimmicky, but it works).

Jessica Marie Fletcher says

I absolutely loved this collection of short stories and the novella, *Some Fun*. Nelson's style aligns with everything I love to read and write about: imperfect families, gritty realities, and strange displacements. Her stories have poignant details that don't leave you, and her novella seasonal accounts for a chaotic daughter-mother relationship. I highly recommend both the stories and the novella!

Bookmarks Magazine says

Nelson's fifth collection of fiction finds a little light around the corner. Though she's not a writer who offers tidy solutions, instead preferring the weight and texture of complex emotions, she has at least opened the window to air these stories out with hope. Reviewers praise her way with metaphor, her rich characterizations, and, most prominently, her avoidance of clich_

Chris says

An often dark but honest look at contemporary life of those drifting toward the edge or negotiating their way along. Emphasis on the young, middle to late teenage years as characters leave childhood behind and begin to participate in or understand the adult choices and consequences around them. And their own possibilities and still unwritten futures. Not sentimental but not cynical.

Michael says

Antonya Nelson is a wonderful short story writer, but I found this collection to be a bit uneven. The best stories, "Dick," "Flesh Tone," "Only a Thing," and "Eminent Domain," were very, very good. Some of the others I found to be practically unreadable. Nelson is very good at writing stories about troubled young people, or about young people dealing with their troubled parents. Some of the stories are quite moving. Others, mostly dealing with alcoholic adults, become a chore to read. Still, she is an excellent writer, and I'm sure that I will read more of her stories.
