



The Lonesome Bodybuilder: Stories

Yukiko Motoya , Asa Yoneda (Translator)

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A housewife takes up bodybuilding and sees radical changes to her physique--which her workaholic husband fails to notice. A boy waits at a bus stop, mocking businessmen struggling to keep their umbrellas open in a typhoon--until an old man shows him that they hold the secret to flying. A woman working in a clothing boutique waits endlessly on a customer who won't come out of the fitting room--and who may or may not be human. A newlywed notices that her husband's features are beginning to slide around his face--to match her own.

In these eleven stories, the individuals who lift the curtains of their orderly homes and workplaces are confronted with the bizarre, the grotesque, the fantastic, the alien--and, through it, find a way to liberation. The English-language debut of one of Japan's most fearlessly inventive young writers.

The Lonesome Bodybuilder: Stories Details

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From Reader Review **The Lonesome Bodybuilder: Stories** for online ebook

Chris says

I received my copy of *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* from the publisher on Edelweiss+.

I have mixed feelings about this set of stories. At first, I thought I generally didn't like it. But, after thinking about each of the stories more, they're growing on me. I've had this reaction before with Oe, Ryu Murakami, and Ogawa, so I'm not going to complain.

I feel like each of the stories grabbed my attention or interest in different ways. Some of them, like *The Lonesome Bodybuilder*, *Typhoon*, *Paprika Jiro*, and *The Straw Husband*, are interesting on the surface because they are conventionally told stories with somewhat bizarre subject matter. Others, like *The Dogs* and *An Exotic Marriage*, create interest primarily through the implications of what is happening in the plot and the characters' psychology.

There's no doubt that Motoya is a talented writer with interesting ideas. Sometimes I wish the ideas were executed more clearly and thoroughly; other times I'm pleasantly surprised. I don't know how much of that has to do with translation choices or that the version I received is not the retail version. (There were some obvious errors in the text of one of the stories in the version I received.)

Either way, if you're into writers like Ogawa, Kawakami, and Wataya, you'll probably enjoy this collection. It'll be out November 6, 2018.

I also put this review on my blog.

Katie says

Weird and wonderful, *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* is a delightfully odd collection of short stories. Using magical realism and the absurd, Yukiko Montoya explores gender roles, social convention, and marital power dynamics in small, powerful bursts.

Motoya's eleven stories all begin with the ordinary, if not mundane, and slowly splinter into the fantastic. A young housewife transforms her body while weightlifting at the gym, yet her husband remains oblivious. A saleswoman gives superb customer service to a guest who refuses to leave the fitting room. Is the customer simply shy? Or is she some unknown creature? A new wife notices that her and her husband's faces are slowly shifting to look like each other. Is it her imagination? Or is it a symptom of losing her autonomy?

Motoya's stories directly challenge the expectations we have for women's bodies. She celebrates women who refuse to submit to their partner's—or society's—will. I've always been a sucker for a unique, experimental story, so I loved this collection. It reminded me of *The Vegetarian* or *Her Body and Other Parties*, although the writing is less lyrical and more direct.

These stories are easy to read, fun, feminist, and joyfully unique! Pick *The Lonely Bodybuilder* up if you are looking for a some variety in your reading life!

Kenny Leck says

Read the uncorrected proof copy, and in parts, it reminded me of the writings of Haruki Murakami, Yoko Tawada, and Hiromi Kawakami. But at the same time, there was a certain newness to it. The stories shone best when they were treated in the long form as the characters had room to grow. I'd would look forward to reading a novel from the author. Without the speculative-fict elements, the tone of the stories reminded one of reading Coetzee as well.

Zachary Houle says

I'm a sucker for Japanese fiction, and?—?generally speaking?—?surreal Japanese fiction is my bag. Some of Haruki Murakami's work has really resonated with me (though he can be a touch weird for weirdness' sake), so when a new Japanese author came out with a short story collection that's very peculiar, I jumped at it. And Yukiko Motoya's debut English translated short story collection is very peculiar. These are stories that you've never really read before, making Motoya something of a Japanese Jonathan Lethem. It's an apt comparison because many of the characters who populate the worlds of *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* are a touch misanthropic, and the weird really does get weird. For example, the very last story in the collection features a husband and wife who have an argument about a seatbelt nicking the door of the husband's new BMW, except the husband is entirely made of straw and, during the course of the argument, begins leaking musical instruments for no apparent reason.

Yeah, I'm not making this up.

So that's all to say that *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* is a very different book, and how much you enjoy it will depend on how much of the weird, the abstract and the completely alien you can take. Me? I liked the book enough?—?though, just like every short story collection on the planet, there are stories that work and stories that fall flat on their face (and you get the lion's share of the latter as these stories are largely so out there that they fail to follow narrative conventions). Having said that, though, I admire Motoya because she's a very brave writer and she's willing to try new things and put forth new ideas that haven't really been heard from before.

Read the rest here: https://medium.com/@zachary_houle/a-r...

Kazen says

These surreal yet grounded stories are exactly my kind of thing.

Many start in the mundane - a happy or unhappy marriage, a scene at work. One strange but believable thing happens, then something a bit more odd, until Motoya leads you down a path to the absolutely absurd. It's ridiculous, but you can't imagine the story spinning out any other way.

Themes include knowing yourself, how we are changed by contact with other people, and the place of women in Japanese society. Even more so than in the West, Japanese women are expected to be wives and

mothers first, putting husbands and children before themselves. These women are the protagonists and navigate their way through a world where many things don't go as planned.

The centerpiece, and one of my favorite stories, is the novella *An Exotic Marriage*. A wife realizes that she and her husband look more similar as time goes on. At first she thinks it's learned mannerisms or maybe sharing a taste in clothes, but one day she looks in the mirror and sees that her features have slipped slightly out of place, closer to those of her husband. As soon as she notices they jump back into position, like kids caught doing something they shouldn't, and the story spins on from there.

I was worried the longer length would mean absurdities would pile up to the point of being unbearable, but instead they're more nuanced and layered. The page count is a strength, giving Motoya more room to develop characters and sub-plots and draw us into the world. *An Exotic Marriage* won the Akutagawa Prize, arguably the highest literary honor in Japan, and it's easy to see why.

Yoneda is an accomplished translator and her skill is well applied here. I am in the unusual position of being able to read in both the source and target languages, but I never felt the Japanese poke through nor the need to back-translate. The reader is in good hands.

All in all I immensely enjoyed *The Lonesome Bodybuilder*. It's perfect for when you want to read something delightfully different.

Thanks to Soft Skull Press and Edelweiss for providing a review copy.

Lauren says

Delightfully weird short stories! My favorites in the collection were the title story "The Lonesome Bodybuilder" and the sprawling "An Exotic Marriage".

Audra (ouija.doodle.reads) says

For fans of the modern stylings of Haruki Murakami, Etgar Keret, Carmen Maria Machado, Karen Russell, and Kelly Link, comes another uniquely brilliant voice in short fiction, and one we are lucky to have.

Most of the stories here center around themes of gender and power dynamics, as well as the problems, loneliness, and loss of true feelings and intimacy that can go along with being in relationships.

Motoya has a strangely specific ability to find a very realistic situation, like a married couple losing touch with each other, and turning it on its head, introducing a completely absurd component that shifts the story into the realm of heightened realism, or even all the way to magical realism.

I loved every story.

There is something really special about the way Motoya focuses on the women in her stories. Mostly, her protagonists are women who are stuck in some type of situation—unhappy in their marriage, with their life, with who they are becoming, with how the past is affecting them. They very clearly see how the problems

are rooted deep in the threads of their daily lives, but it is shaking the issues that prove difficult.

How do you get back to a relationship with you husband when he doesn't notice that you've become a bodybuilder, insane muscles rippling over your body? How do you stay independent and keep your life separate from your life as a couple when you notice that day by day your face is beginning to look more and more like your husband's? What about if as a boyfriend, you only wanted to spice up your relationship and instead your girlfriend challenges you to a duel?

These are the types of stories where you just have to let the weird wash over you. I love becoming immersed in these other worlds where at any moment, the strangest things might happen—people can fly away using umbrellas, turn into flowers, cry blood.

My favorite three stories in the collection for me were: "The Lonesome Bodybuilder," "An Exotic Marriage," and "The Women," though I really loved them all. I would adore to read a novel from Motoya!

My huge thanks to Soft Skull Press for sending me this one to read and review, and I also want to thank them for their continued commitment as a company to publishing unique and brilliant voices.

Rebecca Marie says

Prior to reading the Lonesome Bodybuilder, I had never heard of Yukiko Motoya; now, I find myself a convert worshipping at her altar. Across eleven stories (narrated by women more often than not), the strange is used to displace very real questions about gender, power, and relationships. This is a book wherein a husband and wife begin resembling one another to the point that neither looks human; mountain peonies bloom out of underpants; strange men glide off buildings with the help of umbrellas rendered useless in typhoon rains. I loved this collection, how sure each story was of what it wanted to be. Equal parts Aesop and Kafka but as if written by Lydia Davis, *The Lonesome Bodybuilder* is pure delight.

Tessy Consentino says

Really bizarre, inventive short stories! Just how I like them.

Jerrie (redwritinghood) says

These unique stories filled with magical realism take a tongue-in-cheek look at the relationships between men and women. The stories can seem weird at first, but once you get used to the author's sly humor this is a great read.

Uriel Perez says

There's weird and then there's "Oh my goodness, what the heck did I just read?" weird. The stories collected in Yukiko Motoya's "*The Lonesome Bodybuilder*" belong to the latter group.

These stories are incisive explorations of domestic life fraught with tension and "out-of-left-field" bizarre field trips into the dark woods of the mind.

Immersive, captivating, I can't get enough of Yukiko Motoya!

Natalie (CuriousReader) says

I was introduced to Yukiko Motoya through her short story "The Dogs" published in Granta magazine a few years back and have been eagerly anticipating more of her work making it over to the English book market. Motoya's first book to be published in English, *The Lonesome Bodybuilder*, is a Pandora's box of weird and magical stories. This collection as a whole starts off with stories of real tenderness but with a twist, they go in unexpected directions and it's pure delight to experience them.

Full Review: <https://curiousreaderr.wordpress.com/...>

Madeline Partner says

The stories in Motoya's collection revolve around love, intimate relationships and individuality. Motoya explores the niches of modern society, bringing out the magical in the everyday, in a slightly more up-front and surprising manner than the famed Haruki Murakami. Each story delves deep into the main character's mind, examining their reactions to those around them and the world they inhabit. To express these complex thoughts, Motoya often relies on magical realism, creating bizarre, unexpected relationships and events to explain the nuances of our lives. I thought this collection was well put together; all the stories are well-developed and revolve around similar themes while maintaining some individuality from each other. I am very interested in reading more from this author as more of her work is translated into English.

Lauren says

I was utterly riveted by Motoya's short stories.

I am not much of a short story reader and am very picky about those I do read. But I have found I really enjoy Asian fiction, so I was curious to read *The Lonesome Bodybuilder*.

Motoya's stories are weird, but not a disturbing or uncomfortable weird. More like an engrossing blend of the human mundane and surreal minutia which fluctuates and grows as the story progresses.

There is nothing lost in translation. The writing is succinct and sharp; no flowery detail or unnecessarily long sentences. Just the sort of diction I gravitate to.

Colin says

I loved this book

