



The Liars' Asylum

..... Stories

Jacob M. Appel



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SHORT STORY COLLECTION: The frustrations of romantic love in its various guises—a domineering kindergarten teacher for a dashing artificial foliage designer, a suicidal physicist for his star student, a dialysis patient at a sleep-away camp for the camp owner's daughter—provide the common theme for the stories in Jacob M. Appel's seventh collection. We meet a psychiatrist dabbling with infidelity during a crisis in which rain turns into truth serum, a Finnish-American soldier charged with facilitating his commanding officer's extra-marital affair, and a couple transporting a wealthy, "locked-in" patient across the Piedmont to his new nursing home. Appel's literary short fiction offers a quirky window into the pangs and promise of love.

The Liars' Asylum Details

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Author : Jacob M. Appel

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From Reader Review *The Liars' Asylum* for online ebook

Karen says

I'm not usually a fan of short stories, I always seem to want more from each one that I read. This one was different, and just so good. This touched on a lot of different subjects, a spinster uses her niece to try and find love, an older woman marrying a very young man, a teachers suicide, euthanasia, infidelity, a rain that makes people honest and truthful and a couple other subjects. I really enjoyed all of them! I'm looking forward to reading more from this author, especially one that he sent to me himself, Einstein's Beach House!

Thank you to NetGalley, Black Lawrence Press, and of course Jacob M. Appel for the chance to read this!

Larry H says

"Aunt Jill had been courting Mitch W. at the Citarella fish counter for eight relentless months, stockpiling our freezer with pompano filets and hand-sliced sable, when the giraffe painter swept her off her swollen feet."

There are few, if any, authors out there who can start a short story like that, and yet not have it dissolve into a total farce. Yet with his latest short story collection, *The Liars' Asylum*, Jacob Appel once again proves his talent for memorable phrases and stories that both make you smile and tug at your heart.

This is the fourth collection of Appel's stories I've read, after *Einstein's Beach House*, *Coulrophobia & Fata Morgana*, and *Miracles and Conundrums of the Secondary Planets*, and I find myself again in awe of his storytelling ability, his knack for combining just the right amount of quirk with the right dash of emotional poignancy. It's not just his imagination that dazzles, but it's also the way he creates memorable characters that are far more complex than they initially appear at the start of the story.

The Liars' Asylum features eight stories, each one with its own special qualities. My favorites included "Bait and Switch," the story which opens with the line mentioned above, about a teenage girl tasked by her man-hungry aunt to find her a beau; "Picklocks in Oblivion," in which a man who transports invalids is being convinced by his bewitching young girlfriend to commit an unthinkable act; "When Love Was an Angel's Kidney," about a young girl who falls in love with a daring kidney patient attending her parents' dialysis camp; "Good Enough for Guppies," in which a man must deal with his wife's outrage over her elderly mother's sudden urge to remarry; and the title story, about an emergency room psychiatrist faced with a phenomenon which could greatly affect his life.

The fact is, though, while I mentioned five stories, the remaining three were equally strong, but it didn't make sense to describe every story! At times Appel's dialogue made me laugh, at times it made me think, and it times it even choked me up a little. While some of these stories may have crazy situations at their core, they are not unbelievable or farcical stories—you feel as if you could see each of these happening in front of you.

If you're a fan of short stories, pick up this collection or any of Appel's story collections and see why I consistently find him one of the best story writers out there these days. I know there are many of you who don't consider yourself short story fans, but don't discount the literary form completely until you've tried

some of his stories. I don't know why he's not more well-known, because his talent certainly merits that level of recognition.

The author and Black Lawrence Press provided me a complimentary copy of the book in exchange for an unbiased review. Thanks for making this available!

See all of my reviews at <http://itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blo...>

Chaya Nebel says

Once again Jacob Appel has managed the amazing: he has created a stable of characters in these stories that are funny, sympathetic, hilarious, tragic and most of all realistic. He manages to get inside the heads and inhabit the bodies of very diverse kinds of people and he does it so effortlessly that it is easy to believe that a different author wrote each story.

A teenager girl trying to help her aunt hook a husband. A middle-aged husband trying to help his wife deal with her mother's second marriage. A daughter unraveling the mystery of her father's suicide. A Finnish World War II vet estranged from his wife. Appel masterfully inhabits the souls of such a diverse group of characters here. Their lives are artfully imagined, their personalities and histories so fully fleshed out you could be reading autobiographies instead of fiction.

Thematically the stories share a look at strained familial relations and the underbelly of love. In the first story, "Bait and Switch," we have a quasi mother and daughter (in reality an aunt and niece) who end up almost competing for the same man. In "Good Enough for Guppies," a mother and daughter clash over the mother's second husband-to-be. The third story presents a daughter trying to make sense of her father's suicide.

Some themes developed in most of these stories are: family dynamics and the melodramas that play out in them; another thing they share is they are first-person narrated by characters trying to make sense of the world and situations around them, sometimes to amusing, and other times to tragic, conclusion. Another theme is the difficulties we have in knowing and understanding each other.

As usual the author ends his stories with wallops of emotional punches. He manages to both to wrap up a story, and at the same time pull the rug out from under the reader.

I thoroughly enjoyed these.

Thank you to the author and publisher for a review copy.

Elyse Walters says

And.....

.....this is THE *Jacob M. Appel* I fell in love with three years ago....when he was a still considered a newbie author himself — gifting another talent of his to the world at large - to his 'already' many gifts. When I first met him (not in person.... simply stalked him) - I tried to find a way to fix him up with my older

daughter (they are the same age)— but since that didn't happen - I just kept on reading his books!

I've enjoyed a couple of Jacob's novels - one not so much: and THANK HEAVENS -if I liked EVERY SINGLE STORY JACOB HAS EVER WRITTEN - which are many in a short amount of time: — Steven King move over—? then I'd think something were wrong with me AND him. So YEP... Jacob is still BOY GENIUS in my book — and I do LOVE LOVING his stories more than not.....so I was a very happy camper with ALL EIGHT STORIES in “The Liar's Asylum”.

I must put a plug in for Jacob's memoir, “Phoning Home”.....it's priceless- Other than the many SHORT STORIES - “Phoning Home” is one of my favorites. The physical book —small - fits on your night stand nicely- is ADORABLE!

but it's his SHORT STORIES—?-ALL OF THEM—? EVERY COLLECTION of books—that get me every time!

Physician, attorney, bioethicist, Professor, and once New York Taxi driver.....is a one of a kind AUTHOR! His short stories are EXCEPTIONAL....

....intelligent - thought provoking - edgy- witty- charming- insightful - personal with rich themes- and he includes us (the reader) into his working world by writing about stories where there is a medical doctor and other areas of expertise he's educated and quite knowledgeable in. There seems no subject Jacob is afraid or shy to stay away from —? and I think that's what his 'devotes' (including myself).... with new fans growing each year... love about Jacob M. Appel.

In these 8 short stories - complete in less than 200 pages - he analyzes the absurd- the comical- and the tragic.

“Every secret has its natural snapping point”....

These stories centered around lies and love
love and lies....
Betrayal...
Grief...
narcissism....
Bewilderment...
controversy....
mental challenges
and secrets

When we read Jacob's stories - often quirkybut about ordinary peoplewe look at the world just a little bit different!

WONDERFUL!

Barbara says

Jacob Appel's latest collection of 8 short stories at first seem entertaining and witty, well-crafted and readable. You finish one, mark your spot and go about your business BUT each story stays with you. With further thought you find a deeper meaning, a seed of insight that you may have missed. I find myself reading

my favorites of Jacob's stories at least twice. Another thing I like about Appel is that he seemingly writes with such ease – he is to the short story what the crooners of old were to love songs. Smooth.

This compilation has all winners. The title story called The Liar's Asylum features a night shift doc doing psychiatric evaluations and finding that the newly admitted seem to be compelled to tell the truth. Well, that's a twist.

Then there's Bait and Switch in which Aunt Jill meets the love-of-her-life du jour as he was painting spots on giraffes.

In Good Enough for Guppies, Sheila is beside herself when she discovers her 78 year old mom is engaged. To a younger man. What's the rule for acceptable age differences for couples? Is it half your age plus seven or is it minus seven. What a revolting development this is.

This whole book is a delight to read. And then read again.

Karen says

THE LIARS' ASYLUM WRITTEN BY JACOB M. APPEL

SHORT STORY COLLECTION. Jacob M. Appel's new impressive collection is highly entertaining and enjoyable. I love this author's work which examines many different issues dealing with a vast variety of subjects. Sometimes I ponder the stories for hours after reading them. The stories in this collection will not disappoint. This author has a very extensive list of vocations varying from Bioethicist, Doctor and lawyer, not to mention outstanding author. I enjoyed every one of his previous work. He wrote a fabulous novel called THE MASK OF SANITY, which deals with psychopathy. I highly recommend any of this author's previous work along with this new collection called THE LIARS'S ASYLUM. FIVE STARS11111111111111

Thank you to Net Galley, Jacob M. Appel and the Publisher for the ARC.

Jessica says

I received this book for free from the author in exchange for an honest review.

I give this book 4.5 stars which rounds up to 5.

This is the fifth collection of short stories that I have read from this author and I have loved all of them. It's no surprise that I loved this one too.

The first two or three stories were good but didn't wow me, but the rest of them did. The stories just kept getting better and better.

My personal favorites were “Prisoners of the Multiverse,” “Picklocks in Oblivion,” “The Summer of Interrogatory Subversion,” and “When Love Was an Angel’s Kidney.”

In case you’re not familiar with Jacob M. Appel’s work, he writes the most unique short stories and novels you’ll ever read. He has numerous graduate degrees including a JD, an MD, an MFA in creative writing, an MPhil, and an MS in bioethics so that’s probably why. A lot of his stories pull from those backgrounds. He’s an incredibly talented writer and it shows throughout all his work, especially his short stories.

Overall, if you haven’t read any of Jacob’s work, you definitely should consider reading this collection (or any of his other collections). You won’t be disappointed.

Toni says

I'm late with my review. Once again. Jacob Appel's collection of short stories stuns us! Whether you scratch your head and have to read it over again, or you laugh out loud and say, ah hah; now I get it. You will never ever be board. Jacob has the unique and creative ability to write the most unbelievably relevant stories about strange yet everyday people. Like us. Highly recommend.

Thank you Netgalley and Jacob M. Appel

PattyMacDotComma says

4.5★

“By the age of forty-eight, Aunt Jill—perpetually single, beak-nosed, squat as a parlor stove—had foretold the arrival of an entire fleet of would-be husbands who had never managed to reach port.”

Niece Laurie Jean is co-opted to apply for a summer job with her aunt's current target of her affection (who doesn't know her) and has just enough money to rent a car for a month to drive Laurie Jean back and forth to work so she can flirt with the owner who makes fake foliage for displays. It is absurd and funny and a bit sad, of course, because Aunt Jill really hasn’t got a clue. Getting ready for the drive to work:

“*Does your old aunt look presentable?*” she asked. She looked like a middle-aged prostitute on a television western. Straight off the X-rated version of Gunsmoke. *‘You look fine, I said.’*”

The niece makes friends with the other assistant who likes to sabotage the products by . . . well, I won’t tell. I will say that there’s a big order for a religious project and this girl has fun with it.

I love a good short story, and I thoroughly enjoyed this book. There’s one about a proposed murder that can make you a squirm a bit, and another about an 18-year-old girl trying to handle philosophical arguments while flirting with a graduate student in his 20s. In yet another, a favourite teacher comes to a sticky end and former students make some discoveries.

The stories are quite different from each other, although there is another about a seemingly unmarried

woman finding love in an unusual place. A 78-year old and her 46-year-old boyfriend are planning a wedding in his pet shop in the mall, much to the distress of her daughter. Somehow, the happy couple seem more realistic to me than the worried daughter.

Then there's a story with some magic rain storms where the main character and his wife are trying to have a baby. He's really not that keen, but she's obsessed now.

“—she'd acquired a 'sperm catalogue' from a local clinic and devoted her afternoons to rating photographs and biographies of prospective fathers. She'd already crossed me off the list. 'For thirty grand,' she'd insisted, without a hint of apology, 'we deserve perfection.'”

The nature of the magic rain could have some dire consequences for them (as well as for his attraction to a colleague at the hospital). Oh, what a tangle web . . .

Someone said they make a point of keeping a Jacob M. Appel book on the nightstand so they know there is always something good to read. I'd never heard of him, but he seems to be a multi-talented, 'multi-degreed' NY psychiatrist. Well, I've certainly heard of him now, and I'm delighted to find he's written heaps of things, so my virtual nightstand will be waiting for some of them too.

Thanks to NetGalley and Black Lawrence Press and the author for the preview copy from which I've quoted (so quotes may change before publication).

Debbie says

Screw in the light bulb and start reading!

Jacob Appel could write a story about a burnt-out light bulb and I'd be chomping at the bit to read it. In fact, he'd probably make me believe the bulb looked cool all burnt out. Or maybe he'd convince me that it wasn't really burnt out at all, and he'd find a way to do something great with all the imaginary light. Any way you cut it, he would make the story fascinating.

What an engrossing bunch of love stories this is, not a one of them typical! Many are set in the land of quirk, just far out enough to be fun. Besides, really now, how can you possibly go wrong with a book called *The Liars' Asylum*? The story by that name, which is the last story in the collection, is one of my favorites—it is so imaginative! It's all I can do not to tell you what it's about—hand covering mouth, hand covering mouth!—but I think it's more fun to go into it cold. Let me just say that maybe you should think twice about walking in the rain. If you have secrets, that is. There. Have I intrigued you enough? I didn't do too great of a job of covering my mouth now, did I?

Appel is getting famous for his quirk. I think the quirk works because he adds regular people who confront their realities in the same way we do—with longing, confusion, indecisiveness, caution. The settings are often quirky (and occasionally surreal), but the emotions are always real. Typical people in quandaries, in knots, verklempt. In fact, now that I think of it, most of the characters in the stories are conflicted—I'm sure that's what makes the collection so powerful. Feeling torn is such a common state of being, and one that is full of internal drama. You would think that conveying this would be hard in a short story. Appel makes it look easy.

I never ever thought “When will this story end?” Never ever thought the ending was terrible. Never ever thought the story was missing something. Never ever wanted it to go somewhere different. Never ever thought it was predictable. These are all great never-evers to have!

There are some ambiguous endings, which I usually hate, but they didn’t bother me here. The endings are quiet yet powerful. Oops, wash my mouth out with soap!! (My excuse for lying is honorable: I love these stories so much, I don’t want to complain about anything.) But in fact, some of the stories ended TOO quietly for me. But then I’d repress my slight disappointment and think, no, the story is perfect. This is how real life is. Not everything ends with a bang.

Okay, now that I’ve admitted I was a tiny bit let down by some of the quiet endings, I might as well admit that I wasn’t totally in love with the first four stories. Wait! Yes, I liked them a lot, but they didn’t seem as tight as the last four stories. There is a little too much description thrown in here and there. We’re not talking yawn city or anything—there wasn’t a bushel full of useless information—but I noticed I raced past the descriptions in search of Appel’s brilliant dialogue, action, and insights.

Ah, but those last four stories, they were perfection. Even the titles are total knockouts: Picklocks in Oblivion, Summer of Interrogatory Subversion, When Love Was an Angel’s Kidney, and Liars’ Asylum. And each story lives up to its weird and intriguing title. I’m pretty sure I’ll remember each of these stories and sigh when I think of them—now that’s a pretty good indicator of a good story. Oh, and did I mention that all the stories are well-written? They sooo are (why I just morphed into valley-girl speak, I’ll never know). I’m really trying to give you a sales job here because I think this collection is so good I want everyone to check this author out; he deserves more attention.

Several of the stories touch on ethical issues, such as infidelity, organ donation, May-December relationships. There is serious, there is funny, there is odd—Appel does just the right combo and it works every time. And a few of the stories have twists that are oh so cool. Plus I loved that I never knew what was going to happen. Oh, and did I mention there are nuggets of wisdoms to be found in these stories, too?

Here are a few examples of this wisdom:

“Closeness without conflict, as they say, exists only in the cemetery.”

“Nothing helps you understand your own heritage, I discovered, as much as explaining it to a foreigner.”

“But hugging does not cure desire.”

“...war never determines who is right, only who is remaining.”

Here’s a yummy literary sentence:

“My life—up until that evening—had always seemed something shaped by others, a lump of sand to be sculpted by the human sea.”

And this is one of my favorite lines in the collection. It wins the prize for funny:

“Self-restraint is not Janine’s strong suit. She’s capable of serving venison to Bambi.”

A note about this author: Appel is not only a writer, but also a doctor and a lawyer!! This floors me. How can

this possibly be true? Someone asked him when he found time to write. He says he spends 99 percent of his time practicing medicine, leaving him only 1 percent of the time to write. I'm thinking this guy cannot get much sleep, especially since he's so prolific. And his writing is just brilliant! Check out his profile. He has some interesting answers to his readers' questions.

I discovered Appel a few years ago when I read Einstein's Beach House—oh what a great short story collection that is!! I own and plan to read his other works as well. Even if short stories aren't your genre, I think you'll enjoy these gems.

Thanks to NetGalley for the advance copy.

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

EXCERPT: My best friend that spring was Lacey Moretti. Soon enough we would drift apart, our natural differences overcoming our common history, so when I saw her at the twentieth reunion last year, where Lacey gulped champagne from a slipper and made a sloppy pass at every unhitched male within groping distance, I could hardly remember what had drawn us together on long-ago evenings studying the polarity of magnets and the trajectories of cannon balls. Yet in those final months at Laurendale, we were truly inseparable--so much so that when a third former classmate sensed the tension between us at the reunion, she'd confessed she'd always suspected we'd been lovers. The reality was that we'd both been far too innocent for anything like that. - Prisoners of the Multiverse

The wipers swept the windshield hypnotically, and when the rain stopped, the rubber blades scraped furiously across the dry glass. I didn't even register the sound until Sheila reached across the steering column and snapped them off.

"What can a forty-six year old man possibly see in my mother?" she demanded. "I'll tell you what! He's either after a green card or he's after her money. "

"Or both, " I offered.

Sheila glared at me. "Don't you dare take her side. "

"I'm not taking sides, Sheila. "

"How can you not take sides?" she snapped. "That's like not taking sides about the Holocaust. Not taking sides is the same thing as taking sides. "

Sheila had worked in the creative division at an advertising agency before we married. She has a winning slogan for every argument. - Good Enough For Guppies

THE BLURB: SHORT STORY COLLECTION: The frustrations of romantic love in its various guises—a domineering kindergarten teacher for a dashing artificial foliage designer, a suicidal physicist for his star student, a dialysis patient at a sleep-away camp for the camp owner's daughter—provide the common theme for the stories in Jacob M. Appel's seventh collection. We meet a psychiatrist dabbling with infidelity during a crisis in which rain turns into truth serum, a Finnish-American soldier charged with facilitating his commanding officer's extra-marital affair, and a couple transporting a wealthy, "locked-in" patient across the Piedmont to his new nursing home. Appel's literary short fiction offers a quirky window into the pangs and promise of love.

MY THOUGHTS: I have a special place reserved both in my heart and on my shelves for Jacob Appel's books. I have almost the full set and they are on the shelf right beside my favorite reading chair. It is a

collection that I dip into frequently and *The Liars' Asylum* will take pride of place amongst them.

This is yet another wonderful collection of eight short stories from an extremely talented writer. The focus in this collection is love. But they are not your traditional love stories. They range from tales of first love to that of a last love, and everything in between. And don't expect happy ever after. There is duplicity and truth, desire and rejection, hope and despair, success (of sorts) and failure.

Appel demonstrates an excellent understanding of human character. From the young couple who become more interested in scoring points over each other than in the truth of their relationship, to the desperate for a husband Aunt Jill, all these characters are people we know, we can relate to and, if we are honest, there is probably more than a little bit of ourselves in there too.

Appel has a wonderful sense of the ridiculous which he crafts into clever and believable stories. Another winner from a favorite author.

Publication date is October 15, 2017.

Thank you to author Jacob M Appel, Black Lawrence Press and Netgalley for providing a copy of *The Liars' Asylum* for review. All opinions expressed in this review are entirely my own. Please refer to my Goodreads.com profile page or the 'about' page on sandysbookaday.wordpress.com for an explanation of my rating system. This review and others are also published on my blog sandysbookaday.wordpress.com.

Melki says

. . . and I suddenly knew that I had fallen in love---the sort of love where you feel the sun from both sides.*

Here's another fine mess of wonderful short stories by Jacob Appel, who is quickly becoming one of my favorite writers.

In these eight stories, the author presents a rather quirky look at love in all its many manifestations:

A young girl gets a lesson in artificial friendship when she goes to work for a fake foliage artiste, a stick-in-the-mud daughter disapproves of her elderly mother's marriage to a much younger fish-fancier, and an "epidemic of honesty" causes problems for a psychiatrist who is dissatisfied with his own life.

Appel's writing shines, as always, leaving me bemused, and contemplating my own life's choices. I'd be happy as a clam to read one of his stories each day for the rest of my life (and at the rate he seems to write them, that just might be a possibility.) Perhaps I'll reread some of the older books as I wait (im)patiently for the next one.

My mother, God rest her soul, often warned that love closes your eyes, but marriage opens them wide. I am not sure if this is fair. Closeness without conflict, as they say, exists only in the cemetery.*

*Both quotes are from *The Frying Finn*

I received a review copy from the publisher.

Kelly says

Very interesting collection of stories. Development for each short was nicely done. Neither story was the same as far as pace and character. A very nice mix.

Carol says

4.5 Stars.

THE LIARS' ASYLUM is a **crazy** good collection of eight short stories by Jacob M. Appel....complete with a super cool book cover....and incredibly absorbing writing.

Was all set to post my review with comments about each individual story, but decided these shorts are better read cold turkey.

I will say, I experienced laughter, shock and horror....more than once....was not bored for even a moment, and was thoroughly entertained.

Even if you're not a fan of short stories, you just might want to check this one out!

Definitely a favorite collection for me.

Many thanks to NetGalley and Jacob Appel for the complimentary ebook in exchange for a review.

Zoeytron says

Copy furnished by Net Galley for the price of a review.

A psychiatrist tries to make sense of a barrage of new patients, all with the same complaint. A person who excels at saying nothing, the dual purpose of a plastic bag, an 'epidemic of honesty', and 'an audience of none'. A question lingers, do angels have kidneys?

These short stories are pure slices of life, but tweaked, and some of them pulled asunder. This author has such a way of putting things. Offbeat, capricious, and quite wonderful.
