



Fortune Smiles

Adam Johnson

Download now

Read Online →

Fortune Smiles

Adam Johnson

Fortune Smiles Adam Johnson

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his acclaimed novel about North Korea, *The Orphan Master's Son*, Adam Johnson is one of America's most provocative and powerful authors. Critics have compared him to Kurt Vonnegut, David Mitchell, and George Saunders, but Johnson's new book will only further his reputation as one of our most original writers. Subtly surreal, darkly comic, both hilarious and heartbreaking, *Fortune Smiles* is a major collection of stories that gives voice to the perspectives we don't often hear, while offering something rare in fiction: a new way of looking at the world.

In six masterly stories, Johnson delves deep into love and loss, natural disasters, the influence of technology, and how the political shapes the personal. "Nirvana," which won the prestigious *Sunday Times* short story prize, portrays a programmer whose wife has a rare disease finding solace in a digital simulacrum of the president of the United States. In "Hurricanes Anonymous"—first included in the *Best American Short Stories* anthology—a young man searches for the mother of his son in a Louisiana devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "George Orwell Was a Friend of Mine" follows a former warden of a Stasi prison in East Germany who vehemently denies his past, even as pieces of it are delivered in packages to his door. And in the unforgettable title story, Johnson returns to his signature subject, North Korea, depicting two defectors from Pyongyang who are trying to adapt to their new lives in Seoul, while one cannot forget the woman he left behind.

Unnerving, riveting, and written with a timeless quality, these stories confirm Johnson as one of America's greatest writers and an indispensable guide to our new century.

Fortune Smiles Details

Date : Published August 18th 2015 by Random House Trade Paperbacks (first published August 13th 2015)

ISBN :

Author : Adam Johnson

Format : Kindle Edition 321 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Literary Fiction, Contemporary

 [Download Fortune Smiles ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Fortune Smiles ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Fortune Smiles Adam Johnson

From Reader Review Fortune Smiles for online ebook

Banushka says

bir yazar'ın bir coğrafyayı her şeyiyle, insanı, duygularını, hayalleri, hayal kırıklıkları, tarihiyle anlatması sadece orada yaşadığı mükündür. adam johnson işte böyle olmadır? kanıyor sanki bize. doğu almanya'daki bir hapisane müdürünün yeni hayata adaptasyonunu ya da adapte olamayır?, kuzey kore'den güney'e kaçan iki arkadaşın her şeye rağmen çıktıkları özlemi, gelecekte bir zamanda silikon vadisi'nde yaşayan bir adamın tüm teknolojik gelişmeye rağmen çaresizliğini anlatıyor çünkü. nasıl bu kadar ustalıkla anlatıyor? çünkü anlattığı asıl unsur: insan. insana dair her duyguyu müthiş bir derinlikle işliyor.

kullandığı teknoloji ve tıp terimlerine hiç girmiyorum çünkü belli ki çok çalırkan bir yazar karışımındaki. hem çalırkan hem yetenekli çünkü ilk öyküyle midenize yediginiz yumruktan sonra her güne bir öykü şeklinde ilerleyebiliyorsunuz. hazmetmeniz, güzelliğinin tadına varmanız ancak öyle oluyor.

"ilginç bir bilgi" öyküsü gerek farklı kurgusu gerekse anlattığıyla beni mahvetti.

yüz kitap hayatımdaki en güzel şeylerden biri ^^

Matthew Quann says

Sometimes I read a book so good I wonder what I'm going to say about it in my review. In the case of Adam Johnson's *Fortune Smiles*, I can only attempt to convey my absolute adoration and excitement at the writing horsepower packed into this collection.

Linking the characters over Johnson's six stories is a potent denial of their circumstances, the choices that led them there, or the realizations that might change their lives. What makes each of these stories compelling is the ways in which these characters' world views are juxtaposed with the world around them. In *George Orwell Was a Friend of Mine*, a former Stasi prison warden is in florid denial of the crimes that took place within the walls of his prison as well as the collapse of his marriage. By contrast, the collection's most challenging story, *Dark Meadow*, sees a pedophile trying to reconcile his sexual urges with his self-loathing while a sinister cloud hangs over his every meeting with a child.

Lest you think that all the stories are uniformly grim, Johnson is also infinitely adept at turning a hopeless or disturbing scenario into dark comedy gold. *Hurricanes Anonymous* handles a man who searches for his child's mother in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and pumps some genuinely hilarious moments in amidst scenery that would otherwise be deflating. *Interesting Facts* details a woman's struggle with metastatic breast cancer and manages to be simultaneously melancholy and hilarious due to the narrator's voice. The same story also delivers one of the most powerful slow twists of story that I've read in a long time that left me astonished, shattered, uplifted, and delighted all at once.

These stories work on so many different levels that they feel constantly rewarding and compelling. I was reminded of David Mitchell's ability to spin any genre, voice, time period, or setting into a finely woven tapestry. Much like Mitchell, Johnson's stories feel entirely different from one another: you might be in a slightly futuristic Silicon Valley only to venture to mid-00's Germany or New Orleans. What's more, each of the characters and writing styles in this collection feel wholly their own and help establish a world with startling economy.

I've been reading a lot of short story collections this year (this is my fourth!), but *Fortune Smiles* is likely my favourite so far. Johnson's range on display is startling and his ability to view humanity's darkest corners with empathy is nothing short of a gift. This comes highly recommended from me to any and all readers.

Sofia says

What does not kill you makes you stronger.

Well strong enough to limp your way to the end like Sin-ho or breath by breath like Dark Meadow or seeking solace from holograms or clinging to interesting facts rather than drowning in pain and loss or by numbing ourselves with denial.

This was a tough read but **so so beautiful** in giving us bits of people challenged by adversity and we see the human spirit fighting to survive in any which way possible, just step after step. Johnson gives tough stories and I wonder how people make it through and Johnson explores this, how they try to make it through, not always successfully or morally on the right track, but they/we continue trying like the spider or else we die.

In this world full of judgement, I like that Johnson loves his people enough just to give us them, without judgment, letting me try to figure out the pieces. So allowing me to see how I feel in regards to their life/decisions which shows me where I am at this point in my life.

Read with Maya

Iris P says

Fortune Smiles

This is a fantastic eclectic collection of six stand-alone short stories by Pulitzer prize winner author Adam Johnson. They are almost novella-like in length, so they run a little longer than your average short story.

The geographic settings span from post-Katrina Louisiana to Berlin to North and South Korea. These stories and these characters are dark, controversial and morally complex. There's a deep sense of pain and loss that runs through all of them, but there's also a delightful wicked sense of humor that helps lighten the mood for the reader.

I found it very interesting that two of the stories, *George Orwell Was A Friend Of Mine* and *Fortune Smiles*, are set in Germany and the two Koreas. Countries that although under very different circumstances, ended up split in two blocks, one pledging allegiance to a Democratic-Capitalist type of government -in the case of West Germany and South Korea - and the two others becoming Marxist-Totalitarian regimes, in the case of East Germany and North Korea.

Here's a summary of each story:

Nirvana- Follows a computer programmer who invents a sort of projector that creates a very real three-dimensional hologram. The device lets grieving citizens interact with a recently assassinated president. His wife who suffers from Guillain-Barré syndrome, a rare disease that have left her bedridden, finds comfort in the music of Kurt Cobain. Against her wishes he spends his free time talking to the hologram of the deceased president which is programmed to answer the user's questions and complaints .

There is a clear dystopian atmosphere on this story and I guess the metaphysical question the author explores is, can technology be use to help people overcome pain and loss?

Hurricane Anonymous- Set in post Katrina New Orleans, tells the story of Nonc, a UPS driver who while dealing with both the region's devastation and his own personal chaotic life, is trying to care of a 2 year-old, who may or may not be his legitimate son.

The mother is missing in action, so Nonc is left to wander the FEMA camps, delivering packages while at the same time planning his future with his current girlfriend and trying to find out what happened to the boy's mother.

Interesting Facts- It's about a terminally ill woman, who speculates on her husband and family's life after her death and grows increasingly angrier with what she imagines that'd look like.

George Orwell Was A Friend Of Mine- It's for sure my favorite story on this collection.

The story takes place in 2008 in what used to be East Germany, 18 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The narrator is Hans Bäcker, a former STASI prison administrator. STASI was the secret German policy agency that operated before the country went through the reunification process.

The former warden returns to the prison premises, which is now a museum visited by former prisoners, tourists and German students.

The prison was used by the secret service to held prisoners where they were physically and psychologically tortured and kept under very inhumane conditions. Their crime was trying to flee to West Germany through the Berlin Wall in search of freedom and a better life.

Hans, who is in complete denial about this past, claims he had done nothing wrong, he is a man who *"believes in order and stability, who knows firsthand that without rules, everything descends into chaos"*. The death rate in the prison, he claims, *"was no higher than anywhere else. No one, he claims, was ever tortured on his watch."*

But in this post-unified Germany, Hans is the object of scorn and his presence serves as a reminder of a very dark chapter in his country's history. He's utterly baffled by this new reality and incapable of accepting responsibility for the role he played on it.

Still I thought Johnson left some room for sympathy for Hans, is he to blame and to be considered part of the whole STASI establishment or just a bystander, a man caught on the wrong side of history?

The author also explores the issue of the ubiquitous presence of cell phones and technology in every aspect of our lives and how is affecting the way we think about privacy.

Adam Johnson is a Pulitzer Prize winning American novelist and short story writer.

Dark Meadow- Written from the viewpoint of a pedophile struggling to suppress and cope with his instinctive urges, this one is not doubt, the most morally complex and controversial of these stories. I suspect many readers will shy away from reading it, I almost didn't finish it myself but at the end I am glad I did.

Dark Meadow, is the screen name of a reformed pedophile. He has, for the most part settle down to a quiet life in Los Angeles. He loves gardening and has done to try to atone for his past sins by using his computer skills to expose other pedophiles to the authorities.

All the while he continues fighting his very dark urges. As it happens, the temptation is not far away when two vulnerable young girls that live across the street come asking for help. They live with a neglectful mother who fails to see how perilous is their situation.

Although there's nothing remotely graphic or sexually explicit on this story, I admit that reading it was at times stomach-churning and very disturbing to say the least.

Fortune Smiles- I recently read that the author spent seven years doing research for his 2012 Pulitzer prize winner novel *The Orphan Master's Son*. That level of knowledge is obvious when you read the titled story *Fortune Smiles*.

It features two North Korean defectors struggling, and at times outright resisting to assimilate to their new lives in Seoul.

Several of the reviews I read mentioned that this story was not as powerful as some of the others, I however was impressed by the author's ability to describe the shock culture you experienced as an immigrant, especially if this happens when you are an adult.

Considering the startling political, cultural and economic differences between North and South Korea, I thought the struggles the characters experienced rang very true.

The wide range of stories on *Fortune Smiles* are a testament to Johnson's fertile and original imagination and because they are not interconnected, you can read one at a time without fear of losing track of the plot or the characters.

Hannah says

As is often the case with short story collections, this one was incredibly hard for me to rate because some stories were a lot better than others. This collection was not quite what I expected - the super dark nature surprised me. Adam Johnson shows an incredible range in the stories he tells and in the characters he created. The stories take place all over the world - and one is even set in the future.

I personally preferred the stories set in the US to the ones set elsewhere; they just seemed more authentic to me and the characters were more fully fleshed out. I have to admit to not even finishing the story set in East Germany - it all seemed so stereotypical and so missing heart. I could not connect with the main character in this story at all and he set my teeth on edge. Weirdly enough, this was not a problem I had with the paedophiliac character in another story - and I have to admit that an author who makes me empathize with a person like him must be pretty brilliant.

My absolute favourite story of this collection is called "Interesting Facts" - here Johnson does something so clever with the structure and the way he chooses his words that it made my jaw drop. I have actually read

this story twice already; absolutely, wonderfully brilliant and poignant and so so sad but also hopeful and full of love for human connection.

Panagiotis says

Τον ?νταμ Τζ?νσον τον γν?ρισα μ?σα απ? το The Orphan's Master Son. Ε?χα εντυπωσιαστε? τ?τε απ? ?να σ?νολο χαρακτηριστικ?ν που συν?κλιναν σε ?να συγγραφ?α που δεν αστείεται: μια προσεκτικ? μελετημ?νη ιστορ?α στην Β. Κορ?α, με τον πρωταγωνιστ? να ?χει γ?νει ειδ?μων σε απαγωγ?ς αν?ποπτων πολιτ?ν απ? γειτονικ?ς, δημοκρατικ?ς χ?ρες. Με ε?χε καθηλ?σει η εμβρ?θεια του συγγραφ?α αλλ? και την ?δια στιγμή η απ?λυτη προσ?λωσ? στην αφ?γηση. Ο Τζ?νσον διαθ?τει ε?ρος γν?σεων που σπ?νια συναντι?νται στην λογοτεχν?α, ωστ?σο ?χει τη σπ?νια σ?νεση να μην επιδεικν?ει εαυτ?ν.

Τελικ? κ?νει το 2 στα 2 ο Τζ?νσον; Ανταπεξ?ρχεται στις προσδοκ?ες που καλλι?ρησε ως πολλ? υποσχ?μενος συγγραφ?ας με ταυτ?τητα, δικ? του φων?; ?ταν μια επιφο?τηση της στιγμ?ς εκε?νο το βιβλ?ο ? ?ντως το απα?γασμα του ταλ?ντου του; Λοιπ?ν, ναι, αυτ? εδ? η συλλογ? ?ρχεται να καθιερ?σει τον Τζ?νσον στην βιβλιοφιλικ? μου συνε?δηση ως ?ναν συγγραφ?α που ?μοι? του δεν ?χω δει. Ακολουθ?ντας το ?ραμ? του μ?σα απ? ετερ?κλήτες ιστορ?ες και πολυπο?κιλες αφηγ?σεις, παραθ?τει τις αρετ?ς του προηγ?μενου βιβλ?ου του δ?χως κοιλι?ς, δ?χως συμβιβασμο?ς, δ?χως ποτ? να κουρ?ζεται και να κουρ?ζει - κ?νει την συγγραφ? να μοι?ζει τ?σο ε?κολη.

Η πρ?τη ιστορ?α, ο ?ρωας προσπαθε? να βρει καταφ?γιο απ? τον αργ? θ?νατο της παρ?λυτης γυνα?κας του, σε ?ναν δικ? τους δημιουργ?ας κ?δικα που αναστα?νει το προσφ?τως νεκρ? πρ?εδρο των ΗΠΑ. Οι συζητ?σεις στα κλεφτ?, στην αποθ?κη, με την περσ?να του νεκρ? πρ?εδρο που απαντ?ει με εραν?σματα λ?γων του απ? το διαδικτ?ου. Οι δι?λογοι αυτο? ε?ναι στοιχειωτικ? αλλ?κοτοι, εθιστικο?. ?πως ?λοι οι δι?λογοι του Τζ?νσον. Και ο παθητικ?ς χαρακτ?ρας του μου θυμ?ζει π?σο μου αρ?σουν οι παθητικο? χαρακτ?ρες στην λογοτεχν?α - ?σως και στην πραγματικ?τητα. Δεν ε?ναι ?νας καλλιτεχνικ?ς τρ?πος να ζεις, αφ?νοντας το ρε?μα να σε παρασ?ρνει;

Με μια τ?τοια εκπληκτικ? ξεχωριστ? ιστορ?α, γραμμ?νη με μια γλ?σσα που κατ?πινα με τα μ?τια μου, ξεκιν?ει το βιβλ?ο. Ο Τζ?νσον ε?ναι ?νας αξιοζ?λευτος, εντυπωσιακ?ς συγγραφ?ας. Δεν γρ?φει μ?νο εξαιρετικ?, αλλ? αλλ?ζει σαν χαμαιλ?οντας τον λ?γο του, προσαρμ?ζεται απ?λυτα στην ιστορ?α που θα πει. Με μια εξωφρενικ? ?νεση γρ?φει για αλκοολικο?ς, πρ?ην υπαλλ?λους πολιτικ?ν φυλακ?ν της Ανατολικ?ς Γερμαν?ας, για κυκλ?ματα αν?λικων σεξουαλικ?ν β?ντεο και ?σους των υπολογιστ?ν, για ηλικιωμ?να και μεσ?λικά ζευγ?ρια. Η ?νεσ? με την οπο?α μεταφ?ρει ?λο αυτ? τον πλο?το πληροφορι?ν σα να ε?ναι κτ?μα του ε?ναι εξοργιστικ?. Γιατ? αποκλε?εται να ε?ναι γν?στης τ?σων ετερ?κλήτων πεδ?ων. Μα δεν φα?νεται ποτ? πως μ?χθησε να ερευν?σει για κ?θε δι?γησ? του - λες και γρ?φει αυτ? που γεννι?νται μ?σα του.

Εξαιρετικ? συλλογ? απ? ?ναν συγγραφ?α που τ?ρα πια θα τον θεωρ? ?να σπ?νιο φαιν?μενο. Παλε?ει μ?σα μου ο φθ?νος για τις δεξι?τητ?ς του με την απ?λαυση που πα?ρνω διαβ?ζοντ?ς τον.

Glenn Sumi says

It's been a week since I finished this knockout collection of six stories – which recently won the National Book Award – and its characters continue to haunt me.

Among them are: two North Korean defectors who are lost and aimless in Seoul; a UPS delivery guy in chaotic post-Katrina New Orleans who's temporarily living with his son (he thinks it's his son, anyway) while the boy's mother is AWOL and his own estranged dad is dying in LA; a former Stasi prison warden whose offensive rant while waving around his dog's poo ends up in a viral YouTube video; a pedophile who debugs computers and finds himself drawn to a young neighbour.

The settings – you get a sense of their range from the above paragraph – are distinct and efficiently set up. As with George Saunders's work, there's a sense of urgency to these tales and the people in them. Characters are dying (or have died); they're homesick; they're living in a world they no longer understand; they're trying to avoid the temptations that have caused them to stray before.

One of the main themes is dislocation and dealing with loss. Nowhere is this made clearer than in "Nirvana," the opening story, in which a man (whose wife has a debilitating degenerative disease) creates a program in which you can "talk" to the recently assassinated president (his replies are drawn from things he said while he was alive).

Johnson, who teaches writing at Stanford and won a Pulitzer Prize for his novel *The Orphan Master's Son* (note: there's a character who also teaches writing and won a Pulitzer in the book, so think what you like), knows how to create memorable voices.

Sun-ho, a short, feisty gangster in the title story set in South Korea, practically leaps off the page with his schemes and yearnings. The operator of a halfway house in the post-Katrina story is the voice of reason, even if her words have a hectoring tone. And the pedophile's tale? Yes, Johnson goes there, and he makes him simultaneously sympathetic and scary. Shouldn't the best fiction get you inside the heads of people you don't know?

Make no mistake. These are literary stories. They take work. And they reward rereading so you can see how carefully they've been constructed. But you won't soon forget them.

Dianne says

This is a truly masterful collection of six short stories. 5 of the 6 are longer in length, so they are actually more novellas than short stories.

The stories range from two North Korean defectors trying to make new lives in South Korea; a pedophile grappling with his past and trying to overcome his dark urges; a young mother with breast cancer coming to terms with her fate; a UPS deliveryman in post-Katrina New Orleans who is simultaneously dealing with a manipulative girlfriend and a toddler son who has been abandoned by his mother; a man with a paralyzed and depressed wife who creates a hologram of a recently assassinated president so can feel that he saved someone; and (my favorite) a former superintendent of a notorious East German prison who refuses to acknowledge his complicity in the atrocities committed under his watch.

The thing that I think is most remarkable about this collection is how completely different these stories are in

location, perspective, narrator, and style. Each story has an incredible wealth of supporting detail that makes the story live and breathe. I can only imagine the amount of meticulous research that went into this collection! While the stories are all very different, each is a testament to some aspect of loss - loss of home and country, loss of life, loss of innocence, loss of moral compass. Far from being depressing, though, the feeling I have on completing this is more an appreciation of the complexity of what it means to be human.

Johnson is the real deal. I admit I did not love "The Orphanmaster's Son" - it was such a chore for me to finish, even as I acknowledged his great talent. These stories exhibit that talent in more manageable (for me) chunks.

If you love great writing matched with superb storytelling - and doesn't everyone? - do give this a chance. One of my favorites so far this year; so glad I picked it up. I'll be thinking about these characters for some time.

If you read this, I'd be interested to hear what you thought and what stories/characters (if any) resonated with you. This would be a great choice for a book club. So much to discuss!

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

I felt like I was walking in slow motion, treading water, navigating quicksand, on my way to read this book. I just couldn't get a copy in my hands! And then it won the National Book Award and I missed everything. Except I still had the pleasure of reading it during my slowest week of the year (with more time for reading!)

I was shocked when a book of short stories won the award, knocking out my favorite to win (*A Little Life*.) I almost wish literary awards were more like genre awards, which more often have a separate category for individual short stories. Three stories in this collection could stand powerfully alone, able to defeat any other singular literary story from 2015 - "Interesting Facts," "George Orwell Was a Friend of Mine," and the incredibly disturbing "Dark Meadow." The other three stories are good but lack the pacing that make the other three so powerful.

I loved *The Orphan Master's Son* and I wonder if anything in these stories will find a way into a novel. Post-wall East Berlin seems like a very comfortable setting full of interesting characters based on "George Orwell Was a Friend of Mine," and I could see a longer story being told in that situation. I wonder if this Charles Manson novel that was mentioned several times in these stories really exists somewhere (but it was clever how it tied a few stories together!)

Ron Charles says

The six stories in Adam Johnson's new collection, "Fortune Smiles," will worm into your mind and ruin your balance for a few days. From ravaged American cities to abandoned torture chambers, these pieces take place in an uncanny world you recognize but don't. They're all cast in an unsettling twilight of moral struggle, and each one is a miniature demonstration of why his remarkable novel "The Orphan Master's Son" won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

In fact, the title story, placed last in this collection, returns to the setting of "The Orphan Master's Son." Two

recent defectors from North Korea, DJ and Sun-ho, are struggling to assimilate in the opulence of Seoul. Crooks raised in the gray horrors of the Dear Leader's paradise, they find the people and technology of their new home. . . .

To read the rest of this review, go to The Washington Post:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/enterta...>

Larry H says

Full disclosure: I received an advance copy of this book from NetGalley in exchange for an unbiased review. Many thanks to Random House for making it available!

Adam Johnson is a tremendously talented writer, with a unique and creative voice. Interestingly enough, while I couldn't get into his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Orphan Master's Son*, I enjoyed his previous short story collection, *Emporium*, so I had high hopes for his newest collection, *Fortune Smiles*. And I'm pleased to say that Johnson didn't disappoint me—nearly all of the six stories in this collection were powerful, a few were very moving, and at least one was a bit disturbing.

In my favorite story in the collection, "Interesting Facts," a terminally ill woman grows increasingly angrier about the thought of her husband and family moving on after her death. A programmer tries to deal with his wife's mysterious illness in "Nirvana" by speaking with a simulation he created of the recently assassinated president. In "Hurricanes Anonymous," a UPS driver searches for the mother of his young son, whom she abandoned to his care, while dealing with other emotional challenges as well as life in Louisiana following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The warden of a notorious Stasi prison in East Germany is the protagonist of "George Orwell Was a Friend of Mine," and he has some trouble reconciling his memories of his job with those who try and tell the prison's story. And "Dark Meadow" chronicles the struggles of a IT repairman who also happens to have a bit of a child pornography addiction, although he doesn't see it that way. (Interestingly enough, Johnson revisits North Korea, the setting for *The Orphan Master's Son*, in the title story of this collection, and I found it to be the weakest.)

While Johnson's storytelling ability is outstanding, I feel his greatest strength comes from the characters he has created. These stories are longer than your average short stories and some pack more of a punch, but the characters have stuck in my head the most. The stories are at times quirky, but they're tremendously compelling and get under your skin, which for the most part is a good thing. If you're a short story fan, or a fan of Johnson's, definitely give this one a read.

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

Perry says

Here we are, now entertain us....

Hello, hello, hello, how low

"Smells Like Teen Spirit," Nirvana

Adam Johnson, winner of the 2013 Pulitzer for the phenomenal *The Orphanmaster's Son*, won the 2015 National Book Award for this collection of six stories, which are illuminative, inventive, at times humorous, and always "prosefully" puissant, stories.

In the story "Nirvana," set in the near future, husband tries to cope with suicidal wife's paralysis along with desire to get pregnant. His wife's a big fan of Kurt Cobain/Nirvana. Trying to understand wife's obsession, husband listens to some of their music and quips that he doesn't understand the song, "All Apologies," in which Cobain "never apologizes and doesn't even say what he did wrong." And, jokes to his wife after disrobing, "Here we are, now entertain us," from the song, "Smells Like Teen Spirit."

Adam Johnson seems to me the writer's equivalent to Disney's best imagineer. In the Wonderful World of his Wizardry, Adam Johnson was able to move me in ways that seem counterintuitive and for characters that I'd never have thought possible: by the plight of a North Korean recently immigrated (unwittingly) to South Korea desperately longing to return home; a former warden of an East German prison wherein the Stasi committed atrocities who appears to be suffering dementia (with psychological undertones); cringing while feeling sympathy for a pedophile who was abused as a child; being frustrated by a Louisiana alcoholic/addict a few months after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita searching for his toddler's ne'er do well mom while being afflicted by a Bathsheba wanting to abandon the boy to go to Cali.

Finally, the story "Interesting Facts" is narrated by a wife and mother who had a double mastectomy for breast cancer. The story is one of the most crushing I've read in a while (and it's neither mawkish nor manipulative).

It's too bad that the buying public doesn't purchase more books of short stories. Perhaps, it's because most readers have so accepted the nice and tidy: a perfectly formed beginning-middle-end. And so, they miss out on some of the most moving stories today, packing as hefty an emotional punch in a much more compact frame. This is the second collection of short stories awarded the NBA in the past four years.

Highly recommended.

Maxwell says

I prefer reading short story collections that share an overarching theme to tie them together. With this collection, they all felt quite disparate which made it hard for me to feel fully invested in them. Though his writing is good, I wasn't compelled by many of the stories. Nothing super memorable here to me, but not the worst collection I've ever read.

Laysee says

"Fortune Smiles" is a collection of six brilliantly crafted and imaginative stories. Little wonder it is the winner of the 2015 National Book Award for fiction and the 2016 winner of the Story Prize.

The stories take the reader to diverse locales - Palo Alto, Louisiana, and Los Angeles in the U.S., East Germany, and South Korea - but they all pulsate with the tribulations and pain universally experienced. They revolve around dislocated lives and relationships, irreparable loss, ghosts of the past, and hopes for the

future. I read a few of these stories with bated breath, so skilfully constructed the key triggers are suspended, allowing the layers to slowly peel away. The mood is often one of foreboding. The endings are, I suspect, intentionally ambivalent. It frustrates me somewhat that I will never know what happens next to some of the characters I care about. Thus, the stories take on a haunting quality with the characters hovering around the edge of my consciousness after the stories end.

(view spoiler)

Dark but engaging, "Fortune Smiles" comes close to a 5-star read for me.

Darwin8u says

"All this information," I say. "Yet the world is more mysterious than ever." - Adam Johnson, Fortune Smiles

Seriously, these stories **BREAK** me. Johnson pulls each story's string to the point of breaking and then plays them beautifully with precision and dexterity. 'Interesting Facts' about crushed me -- so good

[Pause, breathe]

Blown away by every single page and every story. Seriously, I might just have to put back on my white shirt and name badge from my 19 yo missionary days and go door-to-door evangelizing about Adam Johnson's book. "Have you read Adam Johnson?" "I know Adam Johnson is True." "A man get nearer to God by reading Adam Johnson's short-stories than any other fiction writer, save perhaps McCarthy". Oh, fine. That is probably an exaggeration, but still, **GOD**, these stories were amazing. Scary even. Like being transported to a foreign land and buried alive. He captures the language of the other and once you get on his train there is no getting off. OK. Perhaps again I am exaggerating. Perhaps, I am caught up in a convert's euphoria. But I'm not new to Adam Johnson. I've read *The Orphan Master's Son* and loved that too.

Erika says

These six amazing stories are all about people disoriented and in pain from a life changing event. It could be illness, a hurricane, or the defection to another country, but whatever has happened to them, the different ways in which they respond brilliantly illuminates the world and who they are in it.

One of my favorite pieces opens with the confusing sentence: “Interesting fact: Toucan cereal bedspread to my plunge and liver.”

About half way through the story the code is revealed, and you realize it means, (view spoiler)

Eventually I saw that the whole piece is a sharply twisting puzzle filled with references to characters in other stories, and even to Johnson himself. As soon as I finished it, I went back and read it again partly to make sure I understood every clever nook and cranny, and partly to spend more time with the fascinating, spiky protagonist who I was rooting for, desperately, even while knowing her cause was hopeless.

In another memorable story, a lonely pedophile lives in a self-imposed prison, both physical and emotional. Creating a sympathetic pedophile is audacious, and Johnson pulls it off with Mr. Roses, a man in terrible pain who hates himself for what he wants, but wants it nevertheless. The story is amazingly layered, like the earth, and Johnson plays with what’s revealed, so that you think you’re reading Crust and Mantle but then, in the middle of a paragraph, you get a sudden, wrenching glimpse of Inner Core that’s gone in an instant.

The other four stories—all dealing with dislocation and loss—are equally powerful and complex. Johnson is a truly great writer and here he’s at the top of his game.

Diane S ? says

Short stories seem to have once again surged in popularity, if one is to go by the many that have been published this year. Seems more and more novelists are either turning or returning to this form. I have never read Johnson's novel so this is my first experience with his writing and it was a successful one. Some of these stories were exceptional, but there really wasn't one I didn't like.

The themes of technology and imprisonment are a common theme among many in this eclectic collection. How we live with, how it can interfere or how we can use it for solace. Imprisonment in ones' own body, in a communist regime or in an actual prison also covers three of the stories. In the title story the author returns to North Korea to tell the story of three asylum seekers in South Korea. They have escaped for various reasons, the twist is that one of them misses North Korea and wants to go back. If he will, why and how he will is the story.

All in all am very good collection, super writing and a wide range of locales.

ARC from NetGalley.

Julie Christine says

"The truth is, though, that you don't need to die to know what it's like to be a ghost."

So observes a woman dying of cancer in the story *Interesting Facts*, a bitter meditation on the life that will continue after she is gone.

Fortune Smiles is haunted by ghosts, nearly all of whom are still alive, but walking shadows, poor players, strutting and fretting their hours upon the stage. Some are victims: the aforementioned cancer patient, and another wife nearly paralyzed by Guillain-Barré syndrome in the story that had the most emotional resonance for me, *Nirvana* (really, the only story that had any emotional resonance for me; most everything else left me feeling hollow, carved out, or soiled and used up); North Koreans, whose lives are only nominally their own; a toddler tossed between negligent parents after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Some of Johnson's characters have left victims in their wake: the former warden of a Stasi prison; a pedophile twisted into a thick cord of self-hatred; people so ill-equipped to raise a child that the word "parent" gets stuck in the throat like a piece of grizzle.

These are difficult stories to read because the suffering is so great. Any notion of satire, with its strained humor, is choked and throttled by the living nightmares of these lives. There is tenderness, particularly in the strange sadness that is *Nirvana* in which a husband finds solace in a hologram of an assassinated president, while his wife seeks out the voice of a dead rockstar; and in *Hurricanes Anonymous* that follows a UPS driver through the storm wreckage, his toddler son in tow. But Johnson withholds resolution and redemption in even the most empathetic of his stories, making them a very bitter pill for this reader to follow.

The writing is brilliant; this is work I admired, but did not enjoy.

Bianca says

I should probably let this great book simmer for a little while and then write the review, but that's not my style - I have to get it done as soon as I finish, otherwise I get distracted and never do it.

This has been easily the best collection of short stories I've read in the past year. I almost considered not requesting and looking up short stories, as the ones I read in 2015 weren't that satisfying.

"Fortune Smiles" is definitely on another level. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking back to the six stories is the incredible diversity of both subjects and writing style.

"**Nirvana**" is about a husband trying to deal with his young wife's Guillaine-Barre syndrome - a debilitating disease. The story takes place in the recent future where holograms and driverless cars are the norm.

"**Hurricanes Anonymous**" is about a man, Nonc, who finds himself in the post Katrina New Orleans with a toddler, who may or may not be his, and a girlfriend. He drives a UPS delivery van, so in many respects he's

doing better than most. But while dealing with the hurricane's aftermath, he's trying to find the child's mother. Also, his good-for-nothing father is dying in California and wants to see him.

Interesting Facts - without a doubt the story that touched me the most, is about a forty-five-year-old woman, who had a double mastectomy and who now imagines how her husband and kids will go on without her. Initially, I was a bit annoyed at the author for embodying a woman, as in how dare he, but I have to say he did a brilliant job which makes me conclude that Johnson must be a very intuitive, observant man. I loved the way this story was written, the tone, the medical tidbits, the brutal honesty. LOVED IT!

"George Orwell was a Friend of Mine" - this was such an interesting story, a subject that I've never come across before. The story takes place in 2008 Germany, and the main character is Hans, former manager of a STASI (the East German secret police) prison, where dissidents were locked up.

I thought this story was very well researched. By having Hans as the narrator, we have a difficult time hating him completely. Was he a bad person or was he just a willing participant, with no better options? As he claims relatively often "somebody had to run the prison". Of course, Hans is in complete denial of his role or of the fact that people were tortured and imprisoned for no other reasons but for wanting to escape, or showing opposition to the dictatorial regime.

Having lived myself in a Communist country and having experienced the transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy, I can vouch that some of the things addressed and expressed in this story felt very authentic. I thought Johnson did a great job in showing the upheaval of change and how some people adapt to it easier than others. There are so many things to draw and learn from this story. This was definitely another favourite.

Dark Meadow - being the story of a paedophile who's also the narrator, I immediately thought of Nabokov's *Lolita*. But the similarities stop there. First of all, the story takes place in our modern times. Our narrator is an IT expert, who lives by himself in LA; he works hard at staying away from temptation and not acting on his impulses. He knows all there is to know about the trading of kids pornography. He also knows that some paedophiles are born, some are made and some just choose. While the subject matter is hard to digest, I, for one, commend Johnson for having the "audacity" to write this story and also kudos to the publishers for including it. It's a very good story.

Fortune Smiles is about North Koreans defectors, who now find themselves in South Korea, where they have freedom and choice, and food!, and the ubiquitous internet, yet, they miss home. How can that be?

This was a very interesting story, that explored, amongst other things, the power of brainwashing of a totalitarian system where not even famine makes people question things. Also, it seems to be a case that "the devil you know" is better than the unknown.

This was another terrific short story. I enjoyed learning new things. It's obvious that Johnson researched the subject greatly.

Actually, all the stories, while extremely varied, were very well researched and felt very authentic. I'm in awe of Johnson's versatility, imagination and research skills. His writing style appealed to me a great deal. It was relatively simple, yet beautiful, and original, and it felt very modern.

A good author creates three-dimensional characters, who are not completely bad or good, they're somewhere in between, like most of us. Johnson is a great writer, managing to show nuances of grey in all the characters.

Speaking of research, I'll have to find some more articles and interviews on/with Adam Johnson, because this is how I roll – when something intrigues me, I research and read extra.

ABSOLUTELY BRILLIANT SHORT STORIES! Highly recommended.

I received "Fortune Smiles" via NetGalley. Many thanks to the publishers, Random House UK, Transworld Publishers, for the opportunity to read and review this terrific book.

Peter Boyle says

I love nothing more than a good short story, so when I spied the award-winning Fortune Smiles in my local bookshop (the wonderful Hodges Figgis in case you are curious), I was rubbing my hands in glee. However this is a curate's egg of a collection: at its best it's extraordinary, at its worst it's completely forgettable.

Of the six stories included, only two made any kind of impression on me. But they are both stunning. The first is a chilling account of a retired Stasi prison warden in Berlin, a man who lives in complete denial of the torture he was complicit in. The second is an incredibly dark tale of an IT repairman in LA, who fights a disturbing addiction. These are very uncomfortable pieces to read but I have to commend the originality and bravery of the writing. Johnson does an amazing job of understanding what it is that makes these unsavoury characters tick, and they can't have been easy subjects to explore. The rest of the collection I just didn't really engage with - the events and observations didn't interest me at all. So if two remarkable tales are enough to make you investigate a book, I recommend Fortune Smiles. Prepare to be shocked/bored, depending on the story.
