



# Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls

*Alissa Nutting*

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## Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls Alissa Nutting

In this darkly hilarious debut collection, misfit women and girls in every strata of society are investigated through various ill-fated jobs. One is the main course of dinner, another the porn star contracted to copulate in space for a reality TV show. They become futuristic ant farms, get knocked up by the star high school quarterback and have secret abortions, use parakeets to reverse amputations, make love to garden gnomes, go into air conditioning ducts to confront their mother's ghost, and do so in settings that range from Hell to the local white-supremacist bowling alley.

## Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls Details

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Author : Alissa Nutting

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# From Reader Review *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls* for online ebook

## Coleman says

I am a Goodreads reviewer. I doubt you'd find anyone who would call this a job, let alone call it "unclean," and as I am not a woman or a girl, I shouldn't be able to identify so well with a book titled *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls*. And yet, it is the best book I've read in 2018.

A Goodreads reviewer should always use hyperbole when discussing books. That's the only way to get readers, and if no one is reading my Goodreads review, then why am I a Goodreads reviewer? I need that validation. I need to hear the people take my reviews seriously, like a bat needs to hear the buzzing of a mosquito in order to eat. Otherwise he is simply enveloped in darkness.

But what I need more is stories that astound. Stories that inspire. And I don't mean inspire as in inspiring coming-of-age tales or battles with cancer or the sickly sweet saga of a rescue dog that makes the owner wonder "Who rescued who?" What I need are stories that begin like this:

"I am boiling inside a kettle with five other people. Our limbs are bound. Our intestines and mouths are stuffed with herbs and garlic, but we can still speak. We smell great despite the pain."

That's page 1, paragraph 1.

The stories that follow all take the familiar and twist them, turning the dread of existence (especially existence as a woman) into a farce. The particularly great farces are masterpieces: "Dinner" which includes the opening paragraph I quoted above, "Ant Colony" about a celebrity who volunteers to have an ant colony inserted inside of her, "Deliverywoman" the story of an intergalactic truck driver who is debating whether to thaw her cryogenically-frozen criminal of a mother, "Cannibal Lover" in which a pill-popper numbed to life has fallen in love with a man who eats people, and "Dancing Rat" where an infertile woman who works on a children's television program is tormented by the show's six-year-old star.

Honestly, all the stories are great, and they are all so memorable not just for their hilarious observations, their succinct and stunningly accurate similes, or for their bizarre yet believable premises. *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls* is un-put-down-able because it understands humanity so well, and the absurdity that such a nebulous concept entails.

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## Jenny says

I had remembered the title of this as "Uncommon Jobs for Women and Girls" which is of course wrong. In many senses. The women who stuck out for me in these stories were often prostitutes or sex workers, which is hardly an uncommon job for a woman. It is, however, perhaps an unclean job.

What Nutting excels at is the quirky premise. The odd situations and scenarios she describes in these stories never fail to grab you, because you keep wondering "how did you think of this bizarre thing." The example that sticks with me the most is every human being required to house another animal because of a space shortage on earth. It is ridiculous to conceive of, and yet this author did.

But these short little stories have nothing going for them other than their ludicrous and arresting premises. There is no character development in the stories, no point to them, no larger insights into anything (the human condition, the environment, I don't know, the importance of snack foods?). They are slight, they are disposable, they are uncommon AND unclear, but they are not generally memorable. I've already forgotten much of the book.

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## **Sonja Arlow says**

THIS is what happens when you don't read the book description in detail before delving in.... My word it was like walking through a fever dream inside a tumble dryer.

Most of the short stories seemed overly explicit for the pure purpose of shocking and disgusting the reader, even though I got the underlying messages and symbolism within most of them.

It almost felt as if I was reading assignments from a creative writing class. Now I didn't hate every single story and two stands out that were quite enjoyable:

1) Ant Colony - When space on earth became very limited, it was declared all people had to host another organism on or inside of their bodies. The very vain protagonist opted to have an ant colony live in her skeletal structure; the result was ultimately that the ant colony started eating her alive from the inside out – vanity can be deadly.

2) She-Man - “My boyfriend Ginno is a pro-bowler. It is not as glamorous as it sounds. I was on the streets for a long time so I took the first chance I got to settle down. Ginno doesn't know I'm really a man, but other than that we're completely honest with one another”.

This was the only story that felt more close to reality than any of the others.

This collection was clearly not my taste but based on the multitude of 4 and 5 star reviews there are definitely people who found this entertaining.

Netgalley Copy

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## **karen says**

i am so glad i read Tampa before reading this one. because while this was good, i think that the stories are better individually than as a collection. there are only a couple that were standouts to my particular tastes, although i am finding that flipping through them now, a week later, to refresh the old memory, i am nodding and thinking, "oh, yeah, that one was pretty cool," whereas reading them in one gulp, i kept scratching my head over why this book was such the darling of the goodreaders a while back.

it's good, don't get me wrong, but it sometimes goes a little deeper into the strained poetic grotesquerie than i can appreciate. and while i love my grotesquerie, i sometimes felt this one was a little arty for me.

but Tampa, while it is about such grotesque subject matter, is artistic rather than arty, if that makes sense to anyone besides me, and i don't know that i would have rushed to read it if i had read this one first, because i am lukewarm with a creeper-appreciation of this collection. she has become more accomplished as a writer, more intense, more heartbreaking and perverse with a real capacity for character complexity.

there are some great ideas here. they are mostly stories of characters striving for human connection, for acceptance, for love, for glory, while the world bitch-slaps them with "oh no, not for *you*."

*she-man* is particularly strong, and one in which you can see the glimmers of her capacity with solid sympathetic characters. the ending is a little "look what i am doing!," and my initial response was "no," but then the final sentence is so perfect and wry that it gentled me into "yes."

i also liked *model's assistant*, with its display of subservience and puppy-doggy pandering and self-debasement just to be close to a shiny empty person, by a not-so-shiny empty person. as a character study, i thought it was really lovely-bleak.

*alcoholic* is another pretty perfect story. pathetic and horrifying, yes, but very tightly controlled - a huge story is told in two pages, which is very impressive.

also in this category of short-but-killer is *the cat-owner*. i don't even know what to say about this one. it's very naked and raw and sad, to me, but also kind of funny. i'm not even sure what is the appropriate emotional response...

those are my favorite pieces, and i think if i were to go back and reread the other stories over a longer period of time and put some space between them, i might like them a little bit more.

i am rounding up the three and a half i feel into a four, because i think i am an outlier in my low-gush response, and i don't want to discourage anyone from reading this just because i am not a cool kid.

but definitely read Tampa. it kicked my ass.

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## Ethel Rohan says

Alissa Nutting's, *Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls*, is unlike any other story collection I've ever read. The first story, *Dinner*, moved me in a profound way. It was awful and brilliant and possibly life-changing. Because of this story, because of the other stories like it in this collection--bold, surreal, deeply compassionate, and highly imaginative--I might just write differently. I might just live differently.

Stories like "Dinner," "She-Man," and "Gardener" made me feel very human, very vulnerable and very afraid. I am going to die. We are all going to die. We know it, but we don't know it. If I have to know it, and

we all do, if I have to feel it, and we all do, then I want to know it and feel it in the painful, wondrous and freeing way I came to it in these crushing, tall-tale stories. This entire collection made me ask myself 'How am I living?' 'How am I using my precious time?'

Admittedly, a couple of the stories in this collection fell a little short for my tastes and felt somewhat incomplete. Others veered beyond the surreal and ran right off the cliff, but overall this collection is an original, worthy, and memorable read. 4.5 stars.

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### **Jenn(ifer) says**

Aw man! See! This is why I don't tend to re-read books! Unless it's one of those books that was pretty much written to be re-read (Ulysses, Gravity's Rainbow, Infinite Jest), it's probably better that I bask in the rosy glow of my first impressions. When I first read this collection of nutty short stories (sorry, had to), I was head over heels! It was love at first read!

Don't get me wrong, I still "really liked" it the second time around, but I no longer think of it as AMAZING. Sniff. I don't want to run out and tell all of my friends to READ THIS IMMEDIATELY! Tear.

That's it. No more re-reading for me. The Vonneguts will forever live in the memory of the 19-year-old girl in me, where they are all five star masterpieces. Tom Robbins will remain the quirky genius I thought he was 15 years ago. Catcher in the Rye, oh who am I kidding, as if Salinger wouldn't hold up to a re-read. He would, right? Right? RIGHT???

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### **jess says**

I wanted to read this book for so long that I can't remember the original reason i wanted to read it but finally the stars aligned and I did. It's a collection of short stories about women with various "unclean jobs," including deliverywoman, porn star, cat owner, gardener, knife thrower, zookeeper, alcoholic, etc. Alissa Nutting plays with how gender works, along with the messy violence, gross bodily functions, and the uglier sides of desire and lust. I am certain this author identifies as a feminist, if you know what I mean. The women in these stories are not in control of their agency, and the men are almost entirely exploitative, mean or misogynistic. There are a lot of funny moments. There is a lot to think about in these pages. Several stories explore fucked up relationships with moms, but most of the conflict is of the romantic man-woman variety. The characters and settings are quite strange: for example, a game show where the winner has anal sex on the moon with the main character, a porn star, or another story with an older woman who is desperately sexually attracted to the garden gnome who comes alive at night to express his virility.

There is explicit material in many of these stories - call it visceral or call it raunchy, whatever you prefer -it's a hallmark of a certain type of feminist fiction written in a sort of time by a certain type of person. I'm not trying to say that it feels very "third wave feminist," just that there are a lot of sexual encounters and sexual elements, among all kinds of woman, of all ages, but certainly not with other women.

I especially liked "Ant Colony." "When space on Earth became very limited, it was declared all people had to host another organism on or inside of their bodies." A vain, beautiful actress has holes drilled into her bones to house a colony of ants. At first, it seems like a perfect solution, as she can't feel the ants and they

aren't visible so they don't affect her work. "I can tell you this: I did love how invisible the ants were. They were creatures that seemed to consider themselves neither important nor beautiful." She begins to sense them inside her, and then they begin to eat her from the inside out. The actress leaves her obligations and life behind to become "Eat, Walk, Lift, Chomp." This story tapped into my long-standing obsession with bot flies, but it was creepier and sadder than any bot fly infestation I've ever thought about. So, there's something in that.

This book offers some interesting tropes to the world of quirky, dark humored, feminist fiction. Nutting gave me something beyond the same rehashed narratives and themes I've come to expect from that type of book. I was, however, colossally disappointed and grossed out by the single trans woman character in the unfortunately-titled "She-Man." The character fell flat and the plot was so predictable. The former prostitute trans woman goes stealth, gets a nice boyfriend with a decent job, a little dog and her own business that allows her to make money off her creativity. Her former pimp tells her boyfriend about her history. The dog gets killed, the boyfriend kicks her out, and then he tells a bunch of bigoted white supremacists that she's a man. The white supremacists beat her to death in an alley after she makes an impassioned plea for life, invoking their sisters, mothers, wives.

I literally cannot understand why this author can write so many interesting stories with unconventional narratives about women, but cannot think of any story involving a trans woman that isn't "exposed, rejected, killed." It is exhausting to me to think of how far we have come on this and yet, here we are, Alissa Nutting writing "She-Man" in the year 2011. At least she didn't try to tackle the subject of race amirite? Small favors.

And that's the crux of this collection for me. It's on point with a lot of feminist issues that define my political life (abortion, sexuality, money, careers, mothering, daughtering, caring for animals, morality, infection, disease, drugs, political guilt, porn, aging, etc) but it seems to fall short in the ways that it could have been exceptional and different. There was an opportunity here, and this book took the easy way out.

You could make excuses for it, like yes, it is fiction and it doesn't make some higher claim to be the perfect modern feminist fables. The fact is, I'm writing about this interesting book that was written in my lifetime by someone who is probably on the spectrum of my social/cultural/political community and I'm saying, this book should have been better than that and I'm not going to stop asking for something better. I just can't.

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## **Tom Willard says**

I largely enjoyed this collection of oddities. Nutting has a fabulous imagination which explores strange angles & surreal mise-en-scene, of which I will not describe as progressing through the arcane permutations is much of the fun. Although, at times, certain stories have a flat tone, use tiresome metaphors and provide cutesy details for seemingly no reason but to provide cutesy details. This is the kind of pitfall I imagine comes from the creative writing programs, even though I did not go through one and I am probably imagining this. The form of the stories, nor use of language are particularly strong in this collection, but Nutting's wild imagination is worthwhile.

I'm on a mission to read more contemporary American writers published by smaller presses.

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## Joshua Nomen-Mutatio says

Throughout the last two or three years I've been transitioning away from a steady diet of things like science, philosophy, history, and politics and into a swift and roaring stream of fiction. (For the time being I'll opt to bypass all yawn-inducing, eye-shuttering, public self-analysis about why and how this has been occurring and just accept these turning tides for what they are. 'Cause, ya know, life happens, man, and sometimes you just gotta enjoy the ride, dude. Bro. Kimosabe.) During this bookish transmigration I've had the pleasure and the good fortune to read a lot of very solid, if not revelatory novels and short story collections. They've tended to be very current publications. Many of them emerging from the same printing presses as one another. Many of them circulating the same literary circles, caught in webs of cross-promotional blurbing by authors of mutual respect and/or perched upon similar artistic vantage points and/or harboring similar literary sensibilities. *Unclean Jobs For Women and Girls* is such a book. The major switch-flipping that set my 'to-read' clicking finger into motion was the enticing nod (more like an epileptic seizure of affirmative head movements) of approval from the great ambassador/knight in shining armor of experimental fiction called Ben Marcus:

*"Alissa Nutting builds a dark catalog of behavior for her characters and the result is a kind of human bestiary, if humans were programmed to go down in flames, to run themselves aground, to seek ruin on every occasion. These fine stories, anthropologically thorough in their view of the contemporary person, illuminate how people hide behind their pursuits, concealing what matters most to them while striving, and usually failing, to be loved."*

Not only did he supply that fantastic blurb but he awarded the book the Starcherone Prize for Innovative Fiction, a title most haven't heard of, including yours truly, but the more important part is that the final two words ("Innovative Fiction") do not falsely advertise the contents behind the book's cover.

Sometimes I loathe comparisons to other authors (because so many seem lazy and cheap and uninformed) but there are two I thought of while reading this book: 1) Aimee Bender's wrist-slashing bedroom-sulking little sister. 2) The former conjoined twin of Ben Marcus who performed the separation with her feral gnashing of teeth. This is just to say that Aimee Bender, while able to dabble with the grotesque via misleadingly sunny build-ups, doesn't take it to the same heights many of the stories in this collection do. And while there's the aforementioned Ben Marcus connection, and a shared penchant for the surreal, the two authors have entirely different agendas, despite a common geneology. And both comparisons are meant to make clear that these stories are creepy and nearly black as pitch. The key word there being *nearly* since I also found just about every single one to be just as funny as it was disturbing.

One way to describe the effect this has is to think of these stories as taking cartoonish premises and making them frighteningly real. The story "Dinner" contains a prime example of this, in that its central premise is that the narrator is being boiled alive in a cauldron of soup with a few other people. It reminded me of these extremely creepy/funny/creepy renditions that I've seen floating around the internet of characters from *The Simpsons* if they were to take on real human features in addition to their cartoonish ones.

I don't really want to divulge much else about the specifics of these stories and mainly because a large part of what makes them so interesting are the premises themselves—not to diminish how well each premise is executed. They're not exactly the kinds of stories one can outline in a spoiler-free way, or simply hint at bits and pieces of without giving away the whole shebang. Suffice to say, this collection is well worth reading if



you like your tales told through a series of highly innovative and sinister-yet-humane crescendos, which often reach a fever pitch that disorientingly blurs the line between the real and surreal.

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### **Kris says**

I have a feeling that bizarro just isn't my genre. Many of my friends have loved this collection (I read it based on many recommendations from them), but it was just too off-the-wall without enough development or substance in the stories for me to be able to enter into their spirit. I don't think it's fair of me to write a full review, since my sense is that Nutting is writing very effectively -- just within a genre that doesn't resonate with me.

Many thanks to Netgalley for providing me with an ARC of this book in return for an honest review.

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### **s.penkevich says**

We all have jobs, and most of us would prefer better ones. If you don't fall into this category, then I applaud you, but it is so easy to fall into dislike for anything that pries open sleep deprived eyes morning after morning and dumps you into bed exhausted to dream of all the living you would rather have been doing during your waking hours. Some of us, the lucky ones, get to pick our jobs, and sometimes we are pulled into the ones life deals us. Alissa Nutting's wildly imaginative Unclean Jobs for Women and Girls explores these jobs that life hands us and is sure to brighten anyone's outlook on their own jobs when juxtaposed to the zany collection she concocts. There are people being served as dinner, porn stars roped into fornication on the moon, a living ant colony, alcoholics, and even the role of a teenager that all are illuminated under Nutting's insightful lens. Full of hilarious wit and creative charm, this cunning collection serves as a bestiary of humanity, exposing all our shortcomings and absurdities as we struggle to find our place in some cosmic joke.

According to her author blurb, Nutting received an MFA from the University of Alabama, and has certainly put this to good use. Reading these stories brings back memories of creative writing courses, and it is apparent she was the student that blew minds and brewed jealousy with each story she penned. We are lucky enough that she harnessed her teeming imagination onto the page, and skillfully wrangled together inspired words and phrases into these visionary stories for all to share. The strange and bizarre nature made me feel right at home after making the rounds through the works of Amelia Gray, whom I HIGHLY recommend (start with *Am/PM*, you will not be disappointed). Not only can Nutting write wonderfully, but the infusion of the black comedy makes this something you should not miss. Many of her observations on her misfit cast will cause you to laugh out loud. *'She did a turn that was so beautiful and practiced and impossible but to Garla was something that accidentally slipped out of her like a tiny fart.'* The same can be said of Nutting's writing.

Although the settings and events are outlandish and bizarre, the characters move through them casually and draw the reader into accepting it as normal. *'I'm not saying I'm better than you, just that my path is way more open with lots of colors.'* This acceptance, and often resignation, to their surroundings is used on a few levels. Initially, this allows one to look at it mockingly and laugh. However, each story tends to deliver an insightful message, often discussing issues that are universal to us, such as about our failings from trying too hard or our fears, beliefs, etc. It then sinks in that if these feelings are right at home in an absurd world,

imagine how absurd they are in *OUR* lives, yet we keep on making the same mistakes and believing in our misconceptions of ourselves and others. This collection of stories focuses primarily on the base, animal instincts that lurk within us all, and through these stories we see just how pathetic and disgusting the human race can be. The story of the porn star, for example, is actually pretty easy going on the porn star and spends most of the time examining how disgusting the men who enjoy this are.

Through each story, we see people trying to be better than who they are, or looking for love (even with the Devil himself), looking for acceptance, and almost always being the source of their own demise (Unless in the case that if you have a cat that foams at the mouth and bites men, than maybe that is your demise). Yet, Nutting makes us laugh at these absurdities we all share by elevating them to a jocular farce. This collection is hilariously probing into all our hearts and souls, and was well served as a big bag of brain candy in between the workout of Ulysses. Oh, and did I mention Ben Marcus not only gave it his stamp of approval, but also awarded it the *Starcherone Prize for Innovative Fiction*? If you are looking for something bizarre and deeply, darkly, funny, well this is the book for you.

4/5

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### David says

I love this book, absolutely love. The stories are just so strange, yet so approachable. Nutting has a perfect bead on how the most surreal moments can be the most revealing about real lives. Compassionate, fun, and moving. I loved each one.

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### Amanda (Kindled) says

Nutting is an author that can't be compared to others. I never know where her brain is going to go. The weird, wonderful, and utterly unique stories that come out of her mind make me wonder what she's been smoking. That being said, I'm not a fan of short stories. I much prefer her novels Tampa and Made for Love. This book is not recommended for those disturbed by dubious consent and other sexual acts.

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### Paul Bryant says

Before we go any further I should say that after swinging wildly from delight to huffiness to outright mockery and then on to feelings of intense gloopiness towards Alissa Nutting, I ended up liking her and her fashionably bonkers stories more than just a little bit. There were a lot of ups and downs. We may as well get the downs out of the way first.

Some of these stories are extremely silly. I know they cruise on the edge of zany surreal absurdist lahdidah, and that's okay. But some of them are, leaving that aside, just too damned silly. These were : Porn Star ("I'm expected to have anal sex with the winning contestant on the moon"); "Bandleader's Girlfriend"; "Corpse Smoker" ("My friend Gizmo who works at the funeral home occasionally smokes the hair of the embalmed dead"); "Gardener"; and "Hellion" (ugh, horrible).

Now the better stuff. Alissa Nutting continues in the modern American tradition of short story writers of the

Deadly-Ironic Faux-Naïve Emotionally-Flattened type who are all the sad clowns of postmodernism and of whom Donald Barthelme is the all time big fat Picasso. Check out a couple of The Don's first lines of stories :

*I bought a little city. It was Galveston, Texas.*

*The death of God left the angels in a strange position.*

And here's a recent first line from one of my favourite stories, Sea Oak by George Saunders:

*Min and Jade are feeding their babies while watching How My Child Died Violently.*

Now here are a couple of Alissa's opening lines :

*I work at a small business that makes ice sculptures for gay pool parties.*

*When space on earth became very limited, it was declared all people had to host another organism on or inside their bodies. Many people chose something noninvasive, such as barnacles or wig-voles.*

*I took a baby panda home from the zoo. Technically, I wasn't supposed to.*

These great set-up intros are remarkably similar to some stand-up – like this very famous Woody Allen sketch:

*I shot a moose once. I was hunting upstate New York and I shot a moose and I strap him on the fender of my car but what I didn't realise was that the bullet did not penetrate the moose, it just creased the scalp, knocking him unconscious.*

Same tone of voice. It's all over the place in modern American short stories, Mary Gaitskell, Robert Shearman, Molly Giles (check out her great story Pie Dance), and it's a good tone of voice, you get to crack off lots of zingers, but it's *samey*.

On to the unassailably good things about a book like this – sometimes I think that stories like the best ones here are as light and free as dandelion seeds and show very clearly that writers should just give up the clunking novel with its Franzenkenstein's monster blunderings because life as I live it anyhow has no plot at all, it's not any kind of pattern denoting thought or design or instinct, it's all in the peripheral vision, it's pieces of cross-pollinated jigsaws that will never match the picture on the lid. The big sensible words in novels are something that we should be against, and resist being co-opted by. Don't fall for that old hat again! I think that sometimes.

Consider these bits –

*When you're a ghost, not haunting is like trying not to laugh.*

*Tonight, I've prepared mashed sweet potatoes. I'm nervous because they look like the diarrhoea of a clown.*

*Kristi and I are watching a home video of her performing fellatio on Chet. She has this idea to make instructional tapes and sell them to the younger girls at school. We're trying to write notes for the voice-over narration.*

These are good enough for me just as they are.

Finally - on page 156 she is writing about a kids' tv show called Whisker-Bop! In which there is a song sung called "Leave it Alone (If It's Under the Sink)". The lyrics are not given, only that title, but I think they just might go something like this:

*Leave it alone if it's under the sink  
It's not good to eat and it's not good to drink  
Don't think that the yellow stuff tastes like ice cream  
If you do you'll have to have extensive skin grafts  
La la la  
La la la  
Extensive skin grafts*

So, okay. Will we be buying Alissa Nutting's second short story collection?

Yes!

3.5 stars.

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## **Sabra Embury says**

I went to a Rumpus reading held in Chinatown this week, and nothing against Rumpus, but I felt like I had better things to do than sit through five people reading what seemed to be journal entries aloud; stories about lost love or strange lust read in the tone of Victorian sentimentality, at an event as modern as free porn on the internet.

As I sat in a corner, playing games on my phone, I thought about aliens and talking wildebeests, and how anything out of the ordinary would add life to the entire experience of the Chinatown soiree. Tentacles even, or an inter-dimensional cataclysm involving blueberry yogurt.

I started *Unclean Jobs For Women and Girls* the next day as part of my kick to explore more women writers for 2011. I finished it later that evening taking breaks between each brief story to let them set as individual pieces, as opposed to one larger story consisting as an array of precarious situations; this pacing was due to the storytelling's consistent voice, which provided the warm comfort of familiarity versus what another reader might perceive as monotony. I was more than satisfied with the final product.

The first story "Dinner" sets the tone with a pot of people being boiled alive as a stew to be served for the dining pleasure of what must be cannibals. The narrator is the lone woman tied and sitting among an array of men in variations of panic as their skin turns pink and sweat beads mixing with broth and various vegetables. Another story "Ant Colony" follows a vain model who volunteers to let a dentist drill holes in her bones to harbor an ant colony.

In "Deliverwoman" an intergalactic delivery person buys her frozen psychotic killer mother at an auction after she's been placed in cryogenic chamber as a four-decade penance for crimes. In "Gardener" a woman falls for a "statuesque" garden gnome after she observes his nightly vigor with braided milkmaids. In my

favorite story "Hellion" a woman sparks a romantic relationship with the devil in hell and gives him tips for interior decorating the hot, stenchy underworld with a roller coaster called SKULLCRUSH.

With the never ending stress of politics, social drama, finances and the constant looming of things like responsibility and boredom, it's nice to be able to escape into written worlds so unfathomable and absurd, making Cynicism feel less like a defense and more like a result of taking oneself too seriously.

What works with keeping the absurdity from being too over the top is the mindset of the women in the stories being told. They're strong, smart, fragile, vulnerable, and taking each of their calamitous issues at hand with an air of nonchalant folly. The attitudes and scenarios in *Unclean Jobs* created by a gifted mutation of dark, sweet and uniquely original melodramas--is profound in its accessibility.

I'm excited to see what else will come from Alissa Nutting's mind in the coming years; whatever it is, I know it won't be so serious that it's a chore to read.

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## Jack Waters says

When a writer tempts fate with stories containing surreal, magical realism, it's an ambition fraught with risk and gamble. Like pulling in a fish of unexpected size, the writer must subtly tug you in to the shore, which takes patience on one end and a fight on the other. The unknown world provided cannot merely be described - it must be felt, seen.

The lay reader doesn't *want* to believe characters are being boiled alive. They won't believe the devil has the time or desire to date. And why do we feel empathetic with him? That ant colony? I mean come on, right? Anthropomorphic gnomonic fantasies fulfilled?

That's where *prestige* is necessary.

Alissa Nutting dives into each story with Belief Prestige so wholly present it feels automatic. Read the first lines of each story -- are they not stories in and of themselves? Are they not each tugging you to shore? The struggle is brief, and worth it.

Writers are the liars we love.

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## Tony says

I, too, have an unclean job; as in "It's a dirty job but somebody has to do it." But that's not what Alissa Nutting means. And it's not what I mean either. This wonderfully imaginative work is not about employment. Instead, it's about the many chambers of the human heart.

*I am boiling inside a kettle with five other people. Check.*

*I'm expected to have anal sex with the winning contestant on the moon. Check.*

*I took a baby panda home from the zoo. Check.*

*"You are embarrassing yourself on a national level," Sister yells into the phone. Check*

*When space on earth became limited, it was declared all people had to host another organism on or inside of their bodies. Check.*

*"The ghost is friendly," says Grandmother. She pushes me inside, throws in a loaf of bread, and locks the vent. Check.*

*I am sixteen years old and I cannot have Luke Gunter's baby. Check.*

*I never had breasts until I went to Hell. Check. Check. Check.*

First lines, all indelibly true. It makes me wonder how a book with such a quirky title could be all about me.

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There is a picture of Alissa Nutting at the back of the book. Don't take this the wrong way, Ms. Nutting\*, but the picture was a little off-putting. Don't get me wrong. She's plenty attractive. The picture has her in the obligatory dark turtle-neck and jeans, folded up so she's hugging her knees and looking sweetly at the camera. Like an outtake from her High School Senior pictures. She looks like if I was telling her a story she would interrupt with an *Awwwww*, and then another *Awwwwwwwww*, and then another, each *Awwwww* having about 4 or 5 syllables. Like she couldn't decide which Jodi Picoult was her fav. Excuse my superficial self, but no one this wholesome-looking should be capable of writing a book this brilliant, this edgy. The person who wrote *this* book is supposed to have a piercing in a very private place and a tattoo in a very public place, has lost count of lovers, and is an embarrassment at family functions. When was her Goth phase; when was her drug phase?

This book is *that* good.

I have had a good reading year if I chance upon a single sentence this good:

*"Your cat sounds like an old Hank Williams song," an old boyfriend once said, but he said it while quickly leaving so it wasn't a compliment the way it could've been.*

Someone who can think like that should never have to buy a drink.

\*I know for a fact that authors secretly come on here to see what people are saying about them.

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The transgendered heroine of *She-Man* is happy now. She has quit hooking and taken up with Ginno, the professional bowler. Life is good.

*When the doorbell rang I was a little baffled – Ginno wasn't due home from the lanes for hours and it's not like we have friends. But the vodka made me cordial – vodka before cooking; vodka so that if and when I start another grease fire I don't get overly agitated.*

Check.

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The little girl returns from the vent, and runs up to her room, away from the smoke, so it doesn't interfere with Mother's smell on her hands.

Check.

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These are fairy tales. Stories, new and yet familiar. That feeling that someone else knows what scares us and what makes us happy, even if we'd never say it out loud.

Go ahead. Don't be afraid. Read this.

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### **Shh says**

Maybe I'm missing the point but I thought this book was pretty lame. There were a few interesting bits (like climbing into Satan's bloody belly pouch and accidentally pissing inside him while on a date together) and some of the language was beautiful but not nearly enough to outweigh the all around drivel. Sure it was strange, and I really like strange, but it was also vapid. These stories have nothing to offer except for their outlandishness. I applaud the creativity it takes to produce such bizarreness but strangeness for its own sake is not enough for me.

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### **Anita Dalton says**

It's not so surprising that I adored this collection – I raved about Nutting's look at a female sexual predator and had high expectations for this book. This collection is less concentrated in terms of content and style than *Tampa* and the varied nature of this collection shows Nutting's skill as a teller of many types of stories. She handles mundane yet self-aware neuroticism like an updated Tama Janowitz (whose seminal summation of '80s New York, *Slaves of New York*, I will be discussing here soon). She dips in and out of fantasy and magical realism with a deft hand and plenty of humor. She is a keen observer of the human condition and tells her stories with great sympathy for her characters, even the ridiculous ones.

You can read my entire discussion, which is very, very long, [here](#).

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

And with that, Alissa Nutting went from being the lady who wrote the other first-person pedophile novel to someone I would so very have far too many drinks with. It's not that I didn't appreciate *Tampa*, but the wider range of voices here, including the occasionally relatable one, was a pretty welcome relief for me, having not been a teenager-doer since I was a teenaged do-y. It's a word. Seriously, everybody knows 99% of humans

over the age of 2 and under the age of approx. 20 are assholes, and I am not an asshole-loving type of girl by nature. I tried my hand at dating an early-20's a year or so ago - which I justified by the fact that he was 6'3" and so at least technically much bigger than me, because my brain is ridiculous - and even that was a differing stations in life, when the fuck did I turn into The Older Woman? type of nightmare that felt more like chaperoning some rowdy nephew to a Rock Concert than courtship. Which maybe had something to do with the fact that I use old people words like "courtship". Anyway, if I'm the voice of reason and responsibility in just about any scenario, we have a real problem on our hands, muh man. So, the hebetastic (also a word) Celeste Price was not a character I could sympathize with in the least, so I more just observed her flat circle of time from some readerly 4th-dimension, uncomfortable all the while. But this! This is a collection of misfits and mishaps I can get behind. Only some of them suck, and only some of them are old. Old like me, because that apparently happened while I had my back turned. Which, goddammit.

But I narcissistically digress! First-foremost, this collection is hilarious. It is also pretty depressing, but what better to laugh at than depressing subject matter? Therapy, you see. The woman whose husband no longer puts out so she has elaborate fantasies involving the garden gnomes in her yard, the secret transsexual and professional sweater-bedazzler, the knocked-up teen star of instructional pornography, the knife-throwing daughter of a knife thrower's daughter, the dating site addicted space-traveler thawing the cryogenically frozen corpse of her homicidal and uncaring mother, all in their strange little ways are composed of circuitry similar to that of just about anyone who has lived a life outside of some cave on Mars. That's funny, because some cave on Mars is just about where all these stories seem to have come from. I mean that as both compliment and warning.

Bizarre as the scenarios are, they are rife with familiar feelings of loneliness, regret, and unease in one's own skin. Either that, or you totally cannot relate to anything except how very much you hate that sort of person, such as the constantly drug-fogged, new-agey trustifarian groupie in *Bandleader's Girlfriend*, who is presented as appropriately contrived and ridiculous. Sooo funny, that one. I never considered what amplified simpleton thoughts might go on inside the mind of a dim-witted, superficial model type high on hallucinogens, but the depiction here is just, well, it's fucking beautiful. I can't express myself today to save my life, so I'm about to stop trying, but just seriously read that story. It wins the This Book Award for me.

Stray thoughts:

-There is a character in one story named Kristi who literally sucks. I know a gal named Kristi who metaphorically kinda sucks. Look, ma, I'm on teevee!

-Hell apparently contains an awful lot of nurses, a concept that working in a hospital has prepared me to appreciate deeply. It almost seems like nursing school offers tuition reimbursement to all the cattiest jerks from your high school. Hypodermic needles, sewing needles, it's all the same to them. Some folks never grow up.

-I like this quiet but effective quote: *The wind stops suddenly. Afterwards, I squint for several minutes in case it starts up again. Whenever something bad happens in my life, it's best if I don't feel relieved when I think it's over.*

My approach to life, in a nutshell.

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