



To Feel Stuff

Andrea Seigel

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Meet Elodie Harrington, college student and medical anomaly. From chicken pox to tuberculosis, Elodie suffers such a frequent barrage of illnesses that she moves into the Brown University infirmary. When charismatic Chess Hunter enters the infirmary with two smashed knees, he and Elodie begin an intense affair, but Chess is only a visitor to Elodie's perpetual state of medical siege. As he heals, he moves back to his former life. Elodie heads in the other direction and begins to see a ghost. When Professor Mark Kirschling, M.D., gets wind of Elodie, he's convinced he can make his professional mark by cracking her case but he" entirely unprepared for what he's about to encounter.

Andrea Seigel has found a wry, ingenious way to explore the contrast between the first frisson of mortality and a life lived in defiance of it.

To Feel Stuff Details

Date : Published August 1st 2006 by Mariner Books (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780156031509

Author : Andrea Seigel

Format : Paperback 269 pages

Genre : Fiction, Young Adult, Mystery, Fantasy, Paranormal

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Megan Mullins says

I wish I could give it 3.5 stars, because there were several points where I felt sure I was going to hate it. At one point I thought (incorrectly) it was going to be some pretentious bs about lending Meaning to your life (with the capitalization that I detest). But 3 stars does not seem fair enough for how good it was, so it shall receive 4 from me. A quality coming of age story told in a super interesting way- one which cannot be described without spoilers. I liked it a lot and I recommend it! Very interesting and very true.

Heather says

What a unique little book this is! I bought the paperback about four years ago, and it has undeservedly sat in abandonment amidst my other books up until this week. If you've ever run across this book in real life, you may have noticed its exquisite cover – the electric blue hands against the off-black background. I'm so glad this book was more than just a pretty face. Bret Easton Ellis perfectly nails the essence of *To Feel Stuff* as "a satire, ghost story, college romance, and medical drama – all crisply presented in a series of simple and beautifully direct scenes." Some readers won't get past "ghost story," while others won't get past the word "simple." If you're still intrigued by the novel's premise, I can tell you that Seigel's straightforward, somewhat simple writing is more than made up for by how uniquely she presents this story. On the surface, yes, it's about Elodie, a sickly college girl who can't shake her various symptoms long enough to be a regular college kid. So, she moves into the Brown University infirmary, where she later meets two other major players in this novel, Chess (a new infirmary "resident") and a professor, Dr. Kirschling, whose goal is to find out why Elodie's health continues to be affected by everything from chicken pox to tuberculosis. I can't tell anything else without giving away too much. Most impressive is Seigel's seamless weaving together of chapters alternately told by the three characters I've just mentioned. The approach as well as the timeline is so creative that it almost makes this a five-star read. I'm holding out on that fifth star, though, simply because this isn't one of those books where I caught myself rereading sentences for the sake of their artistry.

I fear I've turned some people off by oversimplifying Seigel's writing. Though presented with simple words, *To Feel Stuff* had many passages which truly resonated with me, especially this one:

"Telling stories is exhausting, and sometimes I get scared that I'll be telling the same stories for the rest of my life, trying to acquaint new people with my past until I become this factory of repetition. Sometimes I think that if I have to fill in those holes one more time, I'll never say anything worthwhile again."

If you're up for a quick & utterly quirky read that's more a story about first love and the discovery of personal identity than it is any actual ghost story, I highly suggest this one. There's lots of humor packed into these 269 pages. For instance, the first time Elodie hears Chess' voice, he's below the infirmary window singing "Tarzan Boy" with his a cappella group. I laughed out loud as soon as I recognized the "Oh-ay-oh-ay-oh" in its written form. It's one of many hilarious moments in a novel I'll be sure to pass around to my friends.

Josh says

Nice hidden gem. Hidden to me, anyway. Not sure how well-received it was on publication.

'To Feel Stuff' focuses on college student Elodie, a woman who lives in the on-campus infirmary because she mysteriously suffers from an unending succession of illnesses. When fellow student Chess is admitted to the infirmary after a vicious attack, the two develop a relationship while a doctor (who eventually becomes something of an armchair parapsychologist) takes a personal interest in Elodie's case and tries to help her get to the bottom of it.

It's a romance, even a whirlwind one in its own way, but it doesn't seem forced or false. Elodie and Chess are opposite in many ways. Bluntness is one thing they have in common, though, and they're not afraid to call each other out on their faults. It's kind of messy, kind of quirky, kind of 'oh my god we're leaping away from safe ground into maybe a different but nerve-wracking sort of safety'.

The medical mystery takes a backseat for much of the book, while still making the story propulsive. It's more about Elodie's family history, where she came from, where she seems to be headed, what's her place in the (relatively small) world she inhabits. It's about finding a place somewhere between a past that's seemingly set in stone and a future that's so uncertain.

There's a ghost story in there too, the conclusion of which was unexpected but worked perfectly. It's a tough book to describe without giving too much away. It's a brisk read anyway, and well worth picking up if you're into any of the genres it encompasses.

Emily says

Well, this book was thoroughly strange. For a time, I couldn't tell if the melodrama was intentional and was satirizing how seriously college kids take themselves, or if it was totally serious to begin with. Either way, the book was a bit overwritten and meandering. The plot doesn't seem to go anywhere, and then the novel ends abruptly. Vaguely entertaining, but not super substantial or moving. I didn't feel a connection to any of the characters, and I think that was this author's biggest failing with this book.

Natalie says

Once again, I wish I could make use of a half-star rating. I'd actually like to give this book 3.5 stars, but I'm going with three, instead.

This book was an interesting read, blending sickness, love, and the absence of normalcy with the paranormal, of all things. With such a deviance from the norm, cheesiness or unbelievability is a high probability. I'm happy to report that Seigel steers quite clear of both of these, though. I suspect she does so with the clinical nature the doctor's passages take throughout the book. He, in his sometimes skepticism, makes it easier to believe.

Overall, I enjoyed this book. It was wrought with some beautifully crafted passages:

"Dear Elodie,

This is a love note, although for awhile, it may seem more like a deposition. I'm trying, El, and what more can a person ever do? Maybe I don't know what kind of words should go in this type of letter, so maybe I should just be as obvious as I can. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love.
Love. Love. Love.
There.

Okay?

Of course it's not.

You have no idea who I was before I met you. Because when I did finally meet you, it was almost instantaneous, that change in me, so you never understood where I pushed off from."

This passage is startling in its simplicity, yet it also contains a particular sort of elegance. Or, perhaps it just speaks to me because I sometimes consider myself a romantic. At least, some days I see myself that way. Anyway, I digress. What this passage also speaks to is something that is often very difficult, but which Seigel pulls off rather well: the use of the second person. Granted, perhaps she 'cheats' a bit, since the second person is achieved via 'letters' (or excerpts from letters) from two of the characters. But, still. It works.

I did, however, find the book--at times-- rather surface representation of the characters. Perhaps that again comes from the structure (as the book is composed of letters and an article from a journal). At other times, I found the writing profound (as in the above instance), particularly in its simplicity. It's as though Seigel walks a tightrope through the entirety of the work-- on one side lies the surface elements (the pitfalls of the elementary, surface exploration of the characters), and on the other lies a true understanding of human nature, love, and what is beyond and encompassed in both of those. She falls off the rope several times throughout the text, landing on one side or the other, before she precariously balances herself upon it again.

My favorite moments, of course, were those that took place on the latter side of the proverbial tightrope. And I think the work would have been much bolder if she had fallen there more often.

Who is Elodie beyond her sickness and the people she loves? I'm not sure. I feel like I want to know--but, maybe these things are what defines us. Answering that question, though, might have made Elodie less bland, which is another pitfall of this novel, though its not wholly detrimental.

Anyway, overall a good read-- and, rather unlike anything I've read to date. Not sure if I'll be inspired to read her other book (Like the Red Panda), but I'd likely pick it up if I saw it at the dollar bookstore (where I found this book).

Jenn says

Very disappointing 2nd novel. Her first book rocked, but this was a pretentious melodrama.

Jackie says

Have you ever read a book that so bad, yet you just can't stop reading it? This is that book. A huge disappointment, since I adored Seigel's previous book, Like the Red Panda. The main problem with the book is the main character's Mary Sue-ness. Most of the book is listening to people talk about how much they adore Elodie, how great and unique she is blah blah blah.

The problem is that none of these great qualities are actually written into the character - she's rather bland

and boring. The structure is quite bad, too, told from wildly varying points of view, and giving away most of the plot before it's actually gotten to. The point-of-view switches between three characters, two of whom write in letters, and the third, a doctor, who writes in a *Journal of Parapsychology*, *in a way no doctor who has ever lived would write a journal article, ever. Ever.* Horribly informal and busy listing the wonderful personality qualities of the heroine instead of, I don't know, discussing the case.

Yet somehow I feel the need to finish the book, even though the entire plot has been given away and I can't stand any of the characters. It's a like a car wreck. I can't look away. Need to see how bad it can get.

Kierra Trivette says

I picked up this book because the idea of the central character's constant encounters with back to back illnesses interested me. I was disappointed when this was not a focus of the book but I was still entertained with the style of the book. I enjoyed the way the author wrote, the phrases she used and the imagery she created with her words. I did not care for the format of the book, as I found the dialogue a bit hard to follow with the changing of character point of view. I didn't care much for the book. I give it a 2 but I was pretty disappointed with the end. The book seemed to end quickly with all loose ends being tied together in a short space. I also found the book's subject to be a bit hard to follow. I would recommend this book for people who enjoy the rich use of words but not to one looking for a good, well developed plot.

Sarah says

Elodie is a college student whose body has been under attack by a multitude and variety of illnesses. For convenience, she's moved herself into Brown University's infirmary, where she watches wistfully the comings and goings of other patients. Into the infirmary one day comes Chess Hunter, an a cappella singer whose knees have been destroyed in a random act of violence. Instantly feeling a connection, Elodie reaches out for the first time in a long time. But something even more unusual has begun to happen to her. Can she form a bond with Chess and figure out what this new affliction is?

This book was very engaging. I have never read this author before so I can't compare to her other work (as most reviewers saw this as a let-down from her previous novel) but I thought this was a worthy novel. Elodie is a bit unbelievable as a character but still interesting. I loved the structure of the novel, the alternating viewpoints of Elodie, Chess, and Dr. Kirschling. It helped propel the story forward as well as providing respite from each character's voice. This book kept me guessing until the absolute end - literally. I had one chapter left and couldn't figure out what was going to happen! If most people believe her first book to be superior, I will definitely try to track that one down and read it as well. I really enjoyed this.

Allie says

I wonder if this book is getting a popularity bump because of episode 2 of Mystery Show...

Jennifer says

neat premise, I just didn't care for the way it was done. one of my biggest pet peeves is when a story is told from multiple pov's yet the voice is exactly the same. that was the case with Elodie & Chess. I feel it could have been better executed being written as a traditional novel vs letter/memo format. fair amount of eye-roll worthy bits, but it was a quick read.

Andrea says

It was a fast read, that was good. The characters were strange. What was up with Elodie? Was she a hypochondriac? And why didn't she just go home instead of taking up residence in the infirmary? I thought the doctor was creepy, and it seemed like he wanted the relationship to be more than Dr/patient. And Chess? He was just there for a diversion.

Sherrie says

Such a strange and wonderful story. A different narrator for random chapters...a bit confusing at first, but you catch on. The main character, Elodie Harrington, is a student at Brown University who lives in the college infirmary. She suffers from a variety of unrelated illnesses "piggybacked one upon another," so that she never fully recovers. Her story is told from three points of view—Dr. Mark Kirschling's who is chronicling her symptoms in the Journal of Parapsychology and letters between Elodie and Chester Hunter III, a fellow student she meets in the infirmary. As Chester mends and Elodie get sicker, it becomes clear that their blossoming love is threatened by the idea of his health (which is almost the enemy in this book). And then there is the infirmary's ghost. Who is this ghost? What does he want? What is his connection to/with Elodie? The answer is very surprising but fits in VERY well with the strangeness of this book. The feeling of comfortable isolation is very nice and a feeling I revel in. Very good read. Book #50 of my 2006 Book List, finished reading it on 10-14-06.

Lauren says

A good follow up to "Like the Red Panda". Andrea Seigel definitely has a distinctive voice and a way to keep things very interesting and different. I like how she uses three very different characters to tell the same story. Each person tells their version of a piece and the next person picks up where the other left off. It is def not like anything I've read before. And just when you think you are going to find out just what's going on and think you've figured it out for yourself....she completely surprises you.

Hannah Talecki says

I can't help but feel like I just didn't "get" this book. The book is supposed to be written by three different characters, but they all sound exactly the same. The writing is weird and choppy and just... off. The whole book feels like it is building to something big, but then it just kind of ends.

