

Book Review

Title: *Human Oddities: Stories*

Author: Noria Jablonski

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Reviewer: Steven E. Brown

As the title says, this is an odd short story collection. I imagine people unfamiliar with the world of disability might find these stories fascinating. They include characters ranging from separated Siamese twins to an alcoholic drag queen to an obese, apparently cognitively disabled man. On the other hand, I found these tales disturbing: relentless stories of alienation, pain, disillusion, and life's losers.

The book is divided into two sections. The first is a series of three stories all of which are connected through one character who has experienced disasters ranging from bursting a stomach staple from laughing too hard to losing (literally) a sibling because she was confused by an adult's appearance.

The second, and longer, section has six stories. Some of these stories are lengthier, some characters find a measure of redemption, and the alienation is not all related to disability issues. One of the happier stories in the book is also the shortest one and has as its protagonist a wheelchair user. This particular character may be the most "normal" one in the book.

Jablonski's writing is skilled, but for my tasted too focused on life's tragedies. I like complex fiction, but my own thinking is that complexity would include both pessimism and optimism, not just the glass-half-full outlook that dominates most of these stories.