

# **One More Thing Study Guide**

**One More Thing by B. J. Novak**

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## Plot Summary

One More Thing: Stories and Other Stories is a collection of short stories by actor and writer, B.J. Novak. This book contains more than sixty stories that are both flash fiction and traditional short stories. Novak displays his unique sense of humor and cynical view of the world through his fiction, making the reader both laugh and examine their own cynicism. One More Thing is an enjoyable read that will delight both Novak's acting fans and readers new to him in either profession.



# **The Rematch, Dark Matter, No One Goes to Heaven to See Dan Fogelberg, Romance, Chapter One, Julie and the Warlord, The Something by John Grisham, The Girl Who Gave Great Advice, All You Have to Do, 'Rithmetic, and The Ambulance Driver**

## **Summary**

The Rematch. The hare is deeply humiliated by his loss in a race to the tortoise. His reputation has been destroyed and people make fun of him wherever he goes. It is so frustrating to him that he decides to goad the tortoise into a rematch. The hare trained hard while the tortoise feels there is no reason to stress over this race. The hare wins the rematch, but it makes little difference because a hare will always beat a tortoise.

Dark Matter. A young man visits the planetarium and takes a tour with a scientist. The scientist claims to the group that no one truly understands dark matter, but the young man thinks this scientist does. The young man pulls the scientist aside and threatens him until the scientist agrees to tell him the truth about dark matter. However, as the scientist explains his theory, the young man is distracted by texts from his friends. The young man convinces himself that his friends attended a party without him the night before and becomes angry, only to convince himself that he has unreasonably assumed something he did not know to be true. Anyway, if they had gone to a party without him, it really was not a big deal. That night, the young man hangs out with his friends and dismisses the fact that he had a chance to know the truth about dark matter and missed out.

No One Goes to Heaven to See Dan Fogelberg. Tim promised his grandmother on her dying bed that he would see her in heaven. When he died sixty-six years later, he found his wife first, then visited his parents and other relatives and reconnected with friends before looking up his grandmother. Tim and his wife, Lynn, have trouble connecting with Tim's grandmother because she never seems to be home. One night, after again discovering his grandmother gone instead of waiting for their visit, they decide to go see a concert. They discover that every musical act that ever lived and has now died is performing in heaven. They see multiple artists before going to a Frank Sinatra concert. Afterward, they go backstage where they find grandmother performing a sexual act with Sinatra. Grandma explains that she was very old when she met Tim and that most of her friends and family were dead, leaving her part of the living dead in the last years of



her life. In heaven, she has a chance to live again and she does not have time for things she does not enjoy. Tim and Lynn understand and leave her to live happily.

Romance, Chapter One. Two guys look at two cute girls.

Julie and the Warlord. Julie, a young, single woman, goes on a date with a man she met over an internet dating sight. The man tells her he is a warlord in the Congo. The warlord tells her how difficult his job is, but how grateful he is for a recent cease fire so he could travel to America and meet her.

The Something by John Grisham. John Grisham wakes one morning and goes to get the paper as he does most mornings. In the paper, he is shocked to find a full page ad from his publisher congratulating him on his new bestseller, The Something. Grisham calls his editor and demands to know why the book was published with The Something as its title. Grisham had yet to name the book and placed something at the top to simply hold the space. Grisham is angry that the galleys were never sent to him and the editor never followed up. However, when he hangs up and considers the situation, Grisham comes to the conclusion that titles are not as important as the act itself is.

The Girl Who Gave Great Advice. A girl is constantly told she gives great advice. When asked for advice, the girl asks the person to look into their own heart, or gut as the two are interchangeable, and takes credit when a decision is reached.

All You Have to Do. A single guy has the opinion that all you have to do to find love is wear a red shirt every day. He wears one with a pocket.

'Rithmetic. A principal gathers his students into the auditorium of the school and tells them that the difference between happiness and misery in school is adding math to the joys of reading and writing. So, the principal has decided to remove math from the curriculum. The principal is fired and retires to Florida where all he does is read and write.

The Ambulance Driver. An ambulance driver is the fastest in the county. Everyone tells him he is the best at what he does. However, the driver really wants to be a singer and song writer. For this reason, he goes to a friend for advice and she tells him to listen to his gut. He decides to quit his job. The driver becomes moderately successful as a singer/song writer, having one particular hit with a children's song he wrote for his son. The death toll has risen in his county, but not enough to be noticeable.

## Analysis

The first story, The Rematch, is a sort of sequel to the fable, The Hare and the Tortoise. The hare is humiliated, so he demands a rematch, but winning the second time does nothing to change things for him. It only proves the rule, not the exception as the first race did. It is frustrating for the hare. It is also a satiric look at fables and their morals.



The second story, *Dark Matter*, seems to be a comment on the lack of attention among modern youth. A young man has the opportunity to learn what dark matter is, but becomes so distracted by his friends and their texts, that he misses out. However, this young man is not even self-aware enough to notice what he has done or to be disappointed in not achieving such a monumental thing.

The third story, *No One Goes to Heaven to See Dan Fogelberg*, is a humorous story that takes a look at the afterlife. A man promised his grandmother he would see her in heaven when he died, but once he dies, he has trouble finding her. He discovers that his grandmother is having a sort of second childhood, spending time doing things she could not, or would not, do when she was alive. It is also a fascinating look at the differences between the aged and youth during life and the misunderstandings this can cause.

The fourth story, *Romance, Chapter One*, is a flash fiction showing how simply a romance can begin.

*Julie and the Warlord*, is a frightening look at modern dating. The Warlord is a well-known warlord who has terrorized youth in the Congo and killed many innocents. This story is a look at his date with a modern, American girl, making a comment not only on the customs of modern dating, but the indifference of modern youth.

*The Something* by John Grisham considers the question of why people feel the need to put a title to everything. Grisham is angry that his new book was published with the wrong title, but comes to realize that it is a bestseller, whether the title is appropriate or not.

The seventh story is a comedic look at the attributes by which people often base their self-esteem. This woman, in *The Girl Who Gave Great Advice*, never really offers advice to people, but guides them through giving themselves their own advice. However, she bases her self-confidence, her personal identity of herself, on the fact that she gives great advice even though she gives no advice at all. This character will appear again in *The Ambulance Driver*.

*All You Have to Do* is a funny bit of short fiction in which a man claims all he has to do to find love is wear a red shirt each day. It goes to the quirks of modern dating, and the way in which many people make choices based on a specific goal, whether it is realistic or not.

*'Rithmetic* is an example of modern education's quick demise. A principal has decided students do not need to learn math because no one really uses math, anyway. This is meant to make the students happy, to encourage them to do better in other aspects of their education, but it actually discourages those who actually like math. The principal is fired, giving the reader hope that the modern education system is redeemable, but the damage has already been done.

*The Ambulance Driver* is about a man who is not satisfied in his job, so he takes a new one. However, by leaving his first job, the man takes away the speed by which some



who might not have survived did. The man wanted personal glory over the welfare of others. He never got the glory he thought he would find, but people did die. The theme seems to be self-interest over the interests of others.

## Discussion Question 1

What is a fable? Why would someone want to write a sequel to a fable? What does the sequel suggest about the morals of the fable?

## Discussion Question 2

Modern dating rituals is a theme of several short stories in this book. Why is this an important theme? What does the writer suggest about modern dating rituals in these stories? Is it accurate?

## Discussion Question 3

Is math important for modern children to learn? Can principal outlaw math at his school? Why or Why not? Would you outlaw math if you were a principal of a school?

## Vocabulary

ambulance, remembered, breathe, patients, difference, important, generally, universe, another, officially, amateur, famous, manager, apologized, volunteered, subsequent, recognize, statistical, margin, gestures, appreciated, motivational, impressions, immediately, superhuman, intensity





# **Walking on Eggshells (or: When I Loved Tony Robbins), The Impatient Billionaire and the Mirror for Earth, Missed Connection: Grocery Spill at 21st and 6th 2:30 pm on Wednesday, I Never Want to Walk on the Moon, Sophia, The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela, They Kept Driving Faster and Outran the Rain, The Man Who Invented the Calendar, The Ghost of Mark Twain, The Beautiful Girl in the Bookstore**

## **Summary**

Walking on Eggshells (or: When I Loved Tony Robbins). A woman breaks into Tony Robbins hotel room and tells him that she wants him to fall in love with her. After some argument, Tony Robbins agrees to help her achieve her goal. Tony Robbins tells her that she must work out, learn a variety of subjects that he is interested in, and leave things at his home to break the trust he and his wife have. The woman follows his advice and works hard, finding success in the first weeks of their work together. However, the woman comes to the conclusion that she does not want to turn love into an achievement.

The Impatient Billionaire and the Mirror for Earth. A billionaire sat through a speech at a TED conference in which the speaker thought that people would be much different if they could hold up a mirror to the earth. The billionaire decides to build this mirror. It takes longer than expected, but the mirror is eventually completed and put into space. People begin to change. Crime lowers and people are nicer to one another. When the billionaire is restless one night, he looks at himself in the mirror and thinks of what a cool thing he has built.

Missed Connection: Grocery Spill at 21st and 6th 2:30 pm on Wednesday. A woman describes an encounter with a man in a red shirt. She was leaving a grocery store with two bags when he offered to carry one bag for her, despite having a bag in his own hands. He walks her home, goes inside, and they spend most of the day and part of the



night together. When the man left, he promised to come the next day for dinner, but he never does.

*I Never Want to Walk on the Moon.* A person discusses how difficult it would be to go for a walk on the moon because it takes so long to get there and so long to get back. It is better to walk on the earth where you can go and return on the same day. However, the person argues, the views on the moon would be spectacular and it would be a fascinating story to tell.

*Sophia.* A man, who considers himself a romantic, orders a robot from a local corporation that specializes in making task specific robots. The man wants a sex robot. When the robot first arrives, he is impressed with how it looks. However, after their first intimate encounter, the robot wants to talk. The next night, the robot complains about her boring life. One night, the man comes home from work to find the robot crying. She claims that she has fallen in love with him. The man returns the robot to the corporation. When the press learns of this robot and the fact that he returned it, they begin to make fun of him on late night shows. The man finds it amusing, but he is still humiliated. The corporation asks him to speak to the robot so they can see him interact with her. They have a long conversation. Toward the end, she asks him why it bothered him that she fell in love with him. He cannot answer.

*The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela.* Jeffrey Ross hosts the Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela. Ross begins the show by telling a joke on how Mandela took an unjust country and turned it into a violent country. Ross then introduces Pauly D. Pauly D is a reality television star, not a comedian, so his attempt at a joke fails. Then Anthony Jeselnik comes to the podium and jokes about the fact that Mandela originally moved to Johannesburg with his best friend to avoid an arranged marriage. He wonders how ugly the girl he was to marry was. Sarah Silverman makes jokes about Archbishop Tutu, who is also on the stage. Lisa Lampanelli makes jokes about the black men on the stage and how sexy they are. The Dalai Lama appears via satellite, making a joke about Mandela's bad cooking. Gilbert Gottfried makes a joke about Mandela's age. Finally, Mandela takes the podium and asks the audience how they will deal with the gift of freedom. It takes the fun out of the proceedings.

*They Kept Driving Faster and Outran the Rain.* A couple is on vacation in Hawaii. On one of their last days, they take a drive into the hills. It begins to rain and their car is a convertible. They do not want to pull over and put up the roof, so they simply drive faster. They discover the faster they move, the less the rain falls on them. For this reason, they simply drive faster than the rain. When they return home and tell this story to their friends, they are told by a physicist friend that it is not possible. However, they continue to believe it.

*The Man Who Invented the Calendar.* The man who invented the calendar originally intended for it to have twenty-five months with forty days in each month. However, before the end of January arrive, people begin complaining about being bored with it already, so he shortens it to thirty days. In February, he gets into a fight with his girlfriend on February 14, but has no idea why. On February 28, the man decides he is



tired of February and ends the month. On April 1, the man is confused by the pranks his friends and neighbors play on one another. On April 12, he thinks someone should invent a clock. In June, the man meets a new girlfriend. In October, the man begins working on a clock. In November, things become tense with the new girlfriend, Jane. A week later, she is sacrificed. The man is depressed in December and decides to end the year there. On December 31, people party and he finds himself coming out of his depression.

**The Ghost of Mark Twain.** A teacher makes an appointment with a publisher to discuss Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. The publisher thinks the teacher wants to complain about the language in the book, and he is ready for arguments against it. However, the teacher surprises the publisher by saying he wants more bad words added to the book in order to entice the modern reader.

**The Beautiful Girl in the Bookstore.** A girl is fascinated with the items available for sale in some bookstores. She likes to go to the bookstore with her boyfriend when they run out of things to talk about in order to look at these items while he browses the books. The girl tries to get the boy to share with her the uniqueness of the items in the bookstore, but comes to the conclusion that the only beautiful thing he admires in the bookstore is her, and that is not enough. She breaks up with him.

## Analysis

**Walking on Eggshells** is a funny look at the motivational speaker movement from the eighties and nineties. In this story, a woman decides she wants Tony Robbins. Since Robbins is the type of motivational speaker who tells his followers they can have anything they put their minds to, he agrees to help her despite the personal impact it will have on his life. It seems to draw into question what one person has to be willing to do to help another achieve their goals. It also looks at the motivations behind love. The woman thinks that it is enough to want love, but eventually realizes that love should not be a goal. She also realizes she will never feel equal to Tony Robbins.

**The Impatient Billionaire and the Mirror for Earth** is based on the idea that everyone must look themselves in the mirror after committing some act that they may or may not feel shame about. Someone suggests that it would help all of humanity if they could hold a mirror up to the entire earth, to the whole of society. A billionaire decides to make this happen and it does have an impact on the world. However, it does little to change the billionaire himself. This story seems to question the motivations of the rich and how their self-indulgences impact all of society, whether intentionally or by accident.

**Missed Connection** is another look at modern dating. A woman picks up a man at a grocery store, brings him home, and makes out with him for hours without ever learning his name. This questionable behavior could have put this woman in danger, but instead she is making the experience public in a misguided attempt to find him again. A touch of irony enters the story at the end when the reader realizes the man was the same man from the story, *All You Have to Do*.



I Never Want to Walk on the Moon is a story of the self-centered nature of most modern people. Walking on the moon was once an amazing feat, but the person suggests that it is long, tedious, and has no advantage. It seems to make the past accomplishments of NASA seem pointless and it reveals the self-centeredness of most modern people.

Sophia is an tongue-and-cheek look at a committed relationship. In having the sex robot fall in love with the main character, the author takes what should have been a nearly emotionless relationship and turns it into something bigger, something monumental. However, the man wants nothing to do with it. The reader finds humor in this story as they consider how similar this man's actions are to a man who enters a relationship but fails to commit or ends it the moment the woman becomes devoted.

Another story that is a statement on modern society is the Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela. Most of these roasts are controversial and full of humor that is outrageous and offensive. This one is no different. The difference is that Mandela is highly intelligent and he is focused on things that most people do not think about. He questions the freedom of most Americans to say whatever they want, yet they use that right to say horrible, outrageous things. It is a story that makes a person stop and think about the things that come out of their mouths, the things they do in public, and the things they say and do that might affect others.

They Kept Driving Faster and Outran the Rain is a cute story of a couple who think they outran the rain while driving in a convertible in Hawaii. It is physically impossible for them to have done what they did, but they still believe it. It is a theme that touches on belief in the impossible, something few can do but should.

The Man Who Invented the Calendar is a cute story that takes a humorous view of what it might have been like for the man who created the calendar. Although most of the scenarios in the story are impossible or unlikely, it is amusing and fascinating to put a modern twist on such an important modern tool.

The Ghost of Mark Twain suggests to the reader that Mark Twain's writings are just as important in the modern world as it was in his time. However, few want to read the books of Twain because they are not as outrageous or controversial as book banners have suggested over the years. The author suggests that Twain himself would prefer for his books to be highly controversial, because it would encourage people to experience the books.

The Beautiful Girl in the Bookstore is another look at modern dating and relationships. A girl finds the things in bookstores more interesting than the books themselves. Then, ironically, she breaks up with her boyfriend because he is more interested in her than the unique objects. This seems to be a statement on how modern people often overlook the treasures right beneath their noses.



## Discussion Question 1

In what way are Missed Connections and All You Have to Do connected? Why did the author connect them? What is the same about them? What is different?

## Discussion Question 2

How are The Ghost of Mark Twain and 'Rithmetic similar? How are they different? What was the author attempting to do with these two stories?

## Discussion Question 3

What was the theme of The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela? Why would the author write such offensive jokes? What was the purpose of Mandela's question at the end of the story? How does it affect those around him? How does it impact the reader?

## Vocabulary

bookstore, magically, magnifying, dishonesty, disappeared, sometimes, arranged, paperback, bloated, vague, evaporate, failed, perfect, arranged, shuffle, capitals, convened, consequential, ultimate, reactions, random, opinions, exciting, amusement, diminish, unsatisfying, representative, transcendently, average



# **MONSTER: The Roller Coaster, Kellogg's (or: The Last Wholesome Fantasy of the Middle-School Boy), The Man Who Posted Pictures of Everything He Ate, Closure, Kindness Among Cakes, Quantum Nonlocality and the Death of Elvis Presley, If I Had a Nickel, A Good Problem to Have, Johnny Depp, Fate, and the Double-Decker Hollywood Tour Bus, and Being Young Was Her Thing**

## **Summary**

**MONSTER: The Roller Coaster.** An artist has created a roller coaster that is a physical manifestation of how he sees life. Twelve people have been invited to test the roller coaster and give their opinion of it. They seem to understand that it is a representation of life, but some of them did not enjoy it. Others are enthusiastic for it, even hoping to ride it again. At the end, when the mediator asks the group what they would call the roller coaster, most of them choose the name Monster, disappointing the artist because he feels they did not get the point.

**Kellogg's (or: The Last Wholesome Fantasy of the Middle-School Boy).** An eleven year old boy is allowed to buy Frosted Flakes for the first time in his life. The family has a rule against buying sweetened cereals, but the mother makes an exception when the boy throws a fit. The cereal company, Kellogg's, is running a contest in which the lucky winner will win one hundred thousand dollars. The boy is disappointed when he does not win. The next day, the boy goes to the store and spends his own money on multiple boxes of the sweetened cereal. When he returns home, he quickly checks each box for a winner. When he does win, he tells his parents. They advise the child that because he broke their rules, he cannot claim the prize. For this reason, the boy goes to a fellow student and talks him into helping him claim the prize. When the boy meets with the executive vice-chairman of Kellogg's, he is shocked to discover the man is his biological father. For that reason, the boy cannot claim the prize. However, the man offers to raise him as his own son. The boy thinks about it for a while and decides to go live with his biological father.



The Man Who Posted Pictures of Everything He Ate. A man posts pictures of everything he eats because it garners him attention from social networks, though most of it is bad.

Closure. A woman calls her ex-boyfriend and asks him to meet her in a park where they had their first kiss. She believes seeing him one last time will offer her closure. When they meet, she tells him she forgives him for cheating and for the lies he told her. She then asks to kiss him. As they kiss, the woman signals a group of men who inject the man with an unknown drug, place him in a concrete box, cover him with sand, and dump him in the river. They send an email to all his contacts telling them he needs time on his own and then use a program to wipe out all electronic evidence he ever existed.

Kindness Among Cakes. A child asks the mother why carrot cake has the best icing. The mother answers that it is because it needs it.

Quantum Nonlocality and the Death of Elvis Presley. Elvis Presley stopped identifying himself with the man who millions saw as the real Elvis Presley. He wanted to feel as he once had, but the only time he felt connected to that Elvis was when he was on stage, but the next day he would always feel detached. Elvis told the Colonel that Elvis needed to die. A short time later, Elvis woke in Las Vegas. He got a job as an Elvis impersonator and felt better about his life. He died at a lunch counter in 1994. At almost the same moment, the tabloids stopped publishing stories that Elvis was still alive somewhere.

If I Had a Nickel. A person considers what it would take to make a nickel for every cup of coffee spilled. The person would buy large, industrial coffee makers and make 1800 cups of coffee an hour. The person could make \$180,000 a year at a nickel per coffee cup spilled, but expenses would reduce that to \$23,368. Not a fortune, but a decent living.

A Good Problem to Have. An elderly man rushes into a fourth grade class and demands to know if the teacher has ever taught the students the math problem that asks when a person traveling on a train in one direction will meet a person traveling on a train in the opposite direction. When the teacher admits he has, the man claims he wrote the problem but made only \$30 for it. The problem was based on a real life situation in which the man was returning from Europe after helping with the clean up after World War II and his wife could not wait for his train to make it to their home town. She boarded a train heading in the opposite direction and they met in the middle. Now he is frustrated that so many people took this personal scenario and teach it to students. The teacher points out, however, that it is a good thing that millions of children have learned from his problem. A student advises the man to find the original stationary on which he wrote the problem to prove he is the original author.

Johnny Depp, Fate, and the Double-Decker Hollywood Tour Bus. A Double-Decker tour bus is traveling on Mulholland Drive when Johnny Depp comes along the side of it on his motorcycle. It take a moment for the people on the bus to realize who it is. When they do, he keeps pace with them, allowing them to watch him before he finally turns and waves. Depp then decides that the best way to remain forever famous in the eyes of these people is to drive his bike off the cliff in front of them.





Being Young Was Her Thing. Being young was her thing, but every year younger girls come out and try to steal her thing.

## Analysis

A roller coaster has often been used as a symbol for the ups and downs of life. This writer takes the idea a step further and writes about an artist who creates an actual roller coaster that represents life. The people seem to get the idea and they all respond to it in the differing ways of modern people. However, when it comes time to name the coaster, they do not want to call it life, but Monster. The artist is angry and disappointed by this. However, the reader can see that monster is a symbol for the way people look at life, at the obstacles and the difficulties of life.

Kellogg's is a child's fantasy story. There are many children who often wished that they could somehow discover that their parents are not really their parents, that they actually have cooler parents elsewhere. This is exactly what happens in this story. A young boy wants to eat unhealthy, prepackaged foods. When he is finally allowed to buy a box of sugary cereal, it leads him to find out that his biological father is actually the vice-chairman of Kellogg's. It is a funny story that also has something of a serious side when the author points out that, left to their own devices, children do not always make the best decisions for themselves.

The Man Who Posted Pictures of Everything He Ate and Kindness Among Cakes are two pieces of flash fiction. In Pictures, the man puts pictures of everything he eats on the internet despite mean responses from his few followers because he is lonely and wants company. This seems to showcase the idea that many use the internet as a way to interact with the world without having face-to-face contact. Kindness Among Cakes is simply a joke that implies carrot cake is not very good.

Closure is a fantasy that many heartbroken women have likely fantasized about. A man does her wrong, a woman makes him disappear not only from her world, but from the world on a whole. It is humorous, but it illustrates how fantasies sometimes can have catastrophic results when they are made real.

Elvis is a twist on an old urban legend. Many people were so enamored with Elvis during his lifetime, they were devastated upon his death. Therefore, many people, and tabloids, wanted to believe that Elvis had not died, but faked his death in order to escape the pressure of stardom. This story takes that idea and explores it. It also explores the idea that someone could have such a presence in the world that people knew he died even though they had no proof. It is an interesting idea that suggests that some people simply have a larger presence in the world than others.

If I Had a Nickel is another play on an old cliché. If I had a nickel is one of those things people often said when something happened over and over. In this story, the idea is that a person could earn a nickel each time he spilled a cup of coffee. It is amusing, but





proves that even if a person got a nickel for everything bad that happens, or thing that is repeated uselessly, they would not be rich, as the saying goes.

A Good Problem to Have is about the man who wrote the original speed of travel math word problem. The man is sad that he never made the money he thinks he should have from this often used problem. However, as the story progresses, the reader can see that the problem is strongly attached to the man's wife in his mind. The story is not just about a math problem, but is about the grief of a man who spent his entire adult life with the love of his life. Although it is sad that the man lost his wife, it is good that he had her in the first place.

Johnny Depp is a cute story about fame. However, it has a dark ending when Johnny Depp kills himself in order to achieve everlasting fame. The story brings to mind the story of James Dean and other actors who have died, tragically, at a young age. It questions the impact of fame on a person and the desire to keep that fame.

Being Young Was Her Thing is a flash fiction that explores the idea of other women pushing the youth of another into something different. It touches on the vanity of women and the changes that happen in a woman's life when she is no longer the youngest one in the room.

## Discussion Question 1

How is a roller coaster symbolic of life? Why did some of the people enjoy the ride? Why did others dislike it and want off early? What does that say about the people in this story?

## Discussion Question 2

Why did the woman in Closure want her ex-boyfriend killed and evidence of his existence erased from everyone's memory? How did this present her with closure?

## Discussion Question 3

Why did Johnny Depp kill himself in front of his fans? What was the purpose? Would he have achieved this purpose if the story were real?

## Vocabulary

motorcycle, moments, recognize, undeniably, feature, proportion, regular, substantial, envied, performer, excite, noticing, weakened, tandem, negligibly, glamorous, sporadically, double-decker, language, suspenseful, louder, reward, concern, surprise, country, actually, paused, raising, obviously, sometimes, reference



# **Angel Echeverria, Comediante Superpopular, The Market Was Down, The Vague Restaurant Critic, One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie, Wikipedia Brown and the Case of the Missing Bicycle, Regret Is Just Perfectionism Plus Time, Chris Hansen at the Justin Bieber Concert, Great Writers Steal, Confucius at Home, War, If You Love Something, Just an Idea, and Heyyyyyy, Rabbits**

## **Summary**

Angel Echeverria, Comediante Superpopular. Angel Echeverria is a comedian who opens for other acts. Angel bases his act on the Mexican American lifestyle in the Bay Area. He makes many jokes about the local grocery stores and the items found there. However, this is his only bit and most people only go to his shows twice before it becomes old.

The Market Was Down. The stock market is depressed for reasons no one understands. However, it cheers up the next day.

The Vague Restaurant Critic. A restaurant critic is vague in his first review for the newspaper. The next day he is fired although he believes he could have earned a strong audience if they had let him continue.

One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie. Willie is part of a tightknit group of college friends. After college, the friends moved to different towns. Willie ended up in Houston. On social media, Willie often posts pictures of himself partying or lying passed out in unusual places. One of the friends became concerned and suggested that the friends get together and stage an intervention. However, Willie is unable to attend the first arranged meeting. They finally arrange to meet in Las Vegas. The narrator and two of the friends, Josh and Dave, arrive on the first night, but Willie's flight is delayed. They tell Willie they are partying, and to make their story sound less inviting, the



narrator tells Willie he cheated on his girlfriend, Sarah. Willie immediately sends him an email filled with encouragement.

The narrator and his friends party the next day, after Sarah gets a friend to help them gain access to an exclusive club. That night, the narrator is hung over when he meets Willie in the bar. Willie again gives him encouragement and shows restraint when offered drinks. The group gives up on the idea of an intervention and goes out to party. They all leave the next day to return to their lives. Willie changes his social networking picture to him with a group of disadvantaged kids. Dave commits suicide.

Wikipedia Brown and the Case of the Missing Bicycle. One of Wikipedia Brown's friends tells him that his bicycle was stolen. However, Wikipedia only comes up with useless information and rumor.

Regret is Just Perfectionism Plus Time. A grandfather is lying in his bed dying. The man admits to one regret. He bought a lottery ticket once but lost because he put down the wrong numbers.

Chris Hansen at the Justin Bieber Concert. Chris Hansen's daughter wants to go to a Justin Bieber concert on a weekend when Hansen's wife will be out of town. Hansen at first refuses to go because he hosts a television that catches pedophiles. Hansen is afraid that everyone will be watching him to see who he is watching, convinced the people he looks at are pedophiles. Therefore, Hansen would have to keep his eye on Justin Bieber, but that would lead people to believe Bieber is a pedophile. However, his daughter insists, so Hansen finally consents and discovers it is not as bad as he assumed it would be.

Great Writers Steal. Two writers begin robbing local establishments because they believe all great writers steal.

Confucius at Home. Confucius asks his servant for some noodles and the servant thinks his words are profound. Confucius tries to explain he is only asking for dinner, but realizes two of the three things he said were profound.

War. Two children play a game of war and discover that it is long and tedious, leaving them filled with regret.

If You Love Something. Let everything go.

Just an Idea. A couple wins the \$18 million Powerball jackpot. When they arrive to claim their prize, a woman representing an artist offers them \$12 million for the ticket. The artist wants to void the ticket and turn it into a work of art. The couple agrees. That night, the man has the idea to call the representative and offer to return the uncashed check for \$12 million to the artist so that he can do the same thing to the check. The representative does not understand the idea.

Heyyyyy, Rabbits. The narrator looks out the window and sees a rabbit on the back porch. The person thinks that it would be nice to see rabbits out there every day.

However, the person does not want to buy a pet and keep it caged. Therefore, the person sets out a bowl of carrots in order to encourage the wild rabbit to come back.

## Analysis

Angel Escheverria is a comedian who has only one act. While the act is very popular and very funny, it is all he has. People become bored with the act quickly, but he still thinks of himself as popular and sees no reason to work up a new act. This story seems to touch a little on the repetition of themes in some performer's work.

The Market Was Down is a funny story that personifies the stock market and implies that it has down days, just like any other human.

The Vague Restaurant Critic is another story that touches on the theme of professional stubbornness and the fact that some people believe themselves to be so talented that they should be given a chance even when their talents are blatantly opposite of what they should be.

One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie is a story that looks at the way people often misrepresent themselves on social media. Willie makes everyone believe that he is out drinking and partying every night even though he is often working with disadvantaged children. The group of friends decide to stage an intervention for Willie, but it turns out they are the ones partying too hard. In the end, Dave, the one who seems the most together, the one who is attending law school and has a decent life, is the one who needed the intervention.

Wikipedia Brown, Regret Is Just Perfectionism, Great Writers Steal, Confucius at Home, War, and If You Love Something are all flash fiction. Wikipedia pokes fun at the website, Wikipedia. Regret talks about losing the lottery, something the main character could not control. Great Writers takes an old cliché and turns it into a satirical anecdote. Confucius plays with the idea that everything that came out of Confucius mouth was profound. War takes a child's game and makes comparisons to the reality of war in the world at large. If You Love Something is another one that takes an old cliché and modernizes it.

Just an Idea is a funny story about the greed of people. A couple wins the lottery and sells their ticket for \$12 million dollars, more than they could have gotten from the state or the private company who would have paid for the ticket, to an artists who plans to void the ticket and sell it for \$15 million. The couple suggests that they be paid \$15 million for the \$12 million ticket so that the artist can sell the voided check for \$17 million. It is a play on greed that only grows with each deal. The artist, however, does not see the point in the voided \$12 million check and passes on the deal.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does the narrator of *One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie* think that Willie needs an intervention? What makes him think this? What does this story say about social networks?

## Discussion Question 2

What is personification? In which of these short stories does the author personify something? For what reason?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the couple in *Just an Idea* allow an artist to buy their lottery ticket? What do they get out of it? Why do they come up with an idea to get more money?

## Vocabulary

entered, exactly, gallery, frames, decide, certified, awoke, startled, deposit, perplexed, privacy, artist, interested, suspicious, celebrating, structure, jackpot, intercepted, something, definitely, basically, tiresome, regretted, contest, tedious, obviously, scribe, wanted, write, household, servant, interpreted



# **The Best Thing in the World Awards, Bingo, Marie's Stupid Boyfriend, Pick a Lane, "Everyone Was Singing the Same Song": The Duke of Earl Recalls His Trip to America in June of 1962, The Pleasure of Being Right, Strange News, Never Fall in Love, The World's Biggest Rip-Off, The Walk to School on the Day After Labor Day, and Kate Moss**

## **Summary**

The Best Thing in the World Awards. Every year there is an awards show that celebrates the best thing in the world. Love always wins. However, this year 'nothing' is nominated. Everyone is confused. Love wins, but people find the whole thing odd and begin to wonder if nothing actually won. The following year, nothing is made ineligible.

Bingo. Danielle thought it would be nice for her entire family to play bingo together when she discovers that it is offered at the resort where they are staying. Danielle is in close competition with her aunt and uncle when her grandfather suddenly announces he has won.

Marie's Stupid Boyfriend. He did not play the guitar on principle.

Pick a Lane. A car behind the driver honks and yells at him to pick a lane. He cannot decide, however, because both lanes have qualities he likes.

"Everyone Was Singing the Same Song": The Duke of Earl Recalls His Trip to America in June of 1962. The Duke of Earl visits America. Every person he meets, from Texas to New York, hums or sings the same song as they meet him. The Duke finds the song catchy, but does not understand why they sing it.

The Pleasure of Being Right. When a man lost the love of his life, everyone assured him he would be happy someday. Forty years later, as he lay dying alone on his hospital bed, he realizes that he was right: he never was happy again.



Strange News. Multiple news stories. Man returns to a bank to get smaller bills from the hundreds he took in the robbery. A moose interrupts a town meeting on wildlife protection. A record setting tomato is to be processed into tomato sauce. A man sues his brother because he humiliated him when he pointed out the beer he bought in the brother's bar was flat. A man finds the button to his father's coat when he returns to the same cave where his father took refuge from the battlefield twenty-two years earlier. A man receives a text his dead mother sent several days before her death while at her viewing.

Never Fall in Love. A woman becomes a secret agent. On the first day, her boss told her not to fall in love. The woman promptly falls in love with a fellow agent. When the woman hands in her resignation for breaking the only rule given to her, her boss says he only told her not to fall in love to help her fall in love.

The World's Biggest Rip-Off. A man spends a terrible vacation with his family. They went to the baseball hall of fame to please their son, but the son is uninterested after he learns that most of his baseball heroes will never be inducted into the hall of fame because they use steroids. They then went to a cabin owned by the man's parents and spend the week arguing about his refusal to allow the children to see *The Hangover*. On the way home they stop at Niagara Falls for the daughter, but she shows no interest. Finally, the family stops at a Ripley's museum. Inside, the father spots a door with a sign that says world's biggest rip-off. Each person must pay a hundred dollars to enter. The father insists they do it and do it as a family. The mother argues, but agrees. It turns out to be an intricate display of the Bernie Madoff scandal. It is the best part of their vacation.

The Walk to School on the Day After Labor Day. The only good thing about returning to school after summer is that even enemies must go.

Kate Moss. The narrator loved Kate Moss and stared at her picture each day after school. When the narrator spots Kate Moss on the street, she asks how she became Kate Moss. Kate Moss said she stared at pictures of Kate Moss for four hours each day until she became Kate Moss. The narrator went home and did this. She is now Kate Moss.

## Analysis

The Best Thing in the World Awards is a story about an awards contest in which the best thing in the world is chosen. Love always wins, but it nearly lost to nothing this year. This story is a satirical look at the priorities most modern people have.

Everyone Was Singing the Same Song is a funny look at the popular 60s song, the Duke of Earl. The author imagines that the Duke of Earl is a real person and how he might have responded to hearing the song on a visit to America.



The Pleasure of Being Right is also a satirical story that looks at the way in which many people try so hard to be right all the time, even when being right means living a long, lonely life. The man in the story was right, but to the cost of dying alone.

The World's Biggest Rip-off is a funny story that describes a typical family vacation that is ruined by conflicts in the family. However, they are saved by a holographic look at the Bernie Madoff scandal. There is irony in the fact that a scandal that destroyed so many lives had the power to bring one family together during a time of rife.

Kate Moss is a cute story that looks at the way in which the media tells children how they should look. It suggests that if a person stares at a picture of Kate Moss, a person can become her. This is untrue and unrealistic, yet children still try to see themselves in the media's representation of image.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the best thing in the world? Why does the author suggest that nothing could have won out over love? What does this suggest about the author's view of the modern world?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the secret agent's boss tell her not to fall in love in Never Fall in Love? Why does she take it so seriously? Was it meant that way?

## Discussion Question 3

Who is Kate Moss? Why would a teenager want to become Kate Moss?

## Vocabulary

pictures, staring, heartbreakingly, temporary, canvas, pleasures, smothered, awareness, impressed, activities, mastered, learned, begins, fantastic, enemies. Actually, married, financial, hologram, invest, smirky, compellingly, conveyed, mindset, intricate, designed, investment, values, manageable





# Welcome to Camp Fantastic for Gifted Teens, There is a Fine Line Between Why and Why Not, The Man Who Told Us About, New Hitler, Constructive Criticism, The Bravest Thing I Ever Did, Rome, The Literalist's Love Poem J.C. Audetat, Translator of Don Quixote, and Discussion Questions

## Summary

Welcome to Camp Fantastic for Gifted Teens. A former gifted teen who made millions and then lost them, has opened a camp for gifted teens with the hopes of helping them achieve what he has.

There Is a Fine Line Between Why and Why Not. A speaker at a graduation said that there is a fine line between why and why not. However, no one can remember if people are supposed to live on the side of why or why not.

The Man Who Told Us About Inflatable Women. An old man tells a group of people at a children's party that he prefers inflatable women. Not because they inflate, but because they can be deflated.

A New Hitler. The narrator suggests that the world needs a new Hitler who is kinder, who does good works, and who has a different name.

Constructive Criticism. A man takes his ten year old son to the construction site of an office building he has been working on for several years. The boy wants to be an architect. As they tour the building, the boy points out multiple things the father did wrong in the planning and construction of the building. The man points out that the boy's constructive criticism was not very constructive. The boy tries to hide his disappointment in his father.

The Bravest Thing I Ever Did. A person goes to a transgender support group and makes a poor joke in front of the group in an attempt to do something brave. The person did not understand that brave does not mean hurtful, but should be positive.



Rome. A couple retires to Rieti, Italy. The man loves saying that he will be in Rome, returning from Rome, or shopping in Rome as often as possible.

The Literalist's Love Poem. It is literal.

J.C. Audetat, Translator of Don Quixote. J.C. Audetat is a poet. When a publisher notices his Latin name, he is asked to translate Don Quixote for the modern world. The translation proves to be very popular. Audetat moves to Paris and tries to make a go of his poetry career, but finds it unsatisfying. For this reason, he decides to translate Proust. Again, people are very impressed. Audetat goes to America and makes speeches all over the country. People suggest other works he should translate. Audetat translates Anna Karenina. People are very impressed. Audetat settles down, marries and has a child. As his last translation, he chooses *The Great Gatsby*. It is received to high praise.

Discussion Questions. The author has added a list of discussion questions that include questions that wonder about the point of discussion questions.

## Analysis

Many of the stories in this section of the book are tongue-in-cheek satire. The author uses several situations in order to express his opinions of the modern world. In *Camp Fantastic*, *A New Hitler*, *The Bravest Thing I Ever Did*, and *There Is a Fine Line Between Why and Why Not*, the author uses specific situations and events to discuss acceptable social behavior. In *Camp Fantastic*, a man is encouraging teenagers to have sex and do drugs. In *The Bravest Thing*, a person gets up in a support group and essentially makes fun of the purpose of the meeting. *The New Hitler* shows how much many people misunderstand what it was Hitler did. These things all show the reader that the author feels most modern people no longer try very hard to be respectful to others and that history has been lost to many.

*Constructive Criticism* is a cute story that suggests a ten year old knows better how to build a building than his father, an architect. It is a cute look at the relationship between parents and children. It also seems to be a satirical representation of the lack of trust in people whose profession it is to provide housing for society.

*Audetat* is a story that discusses how one man made a living for himself by rewriting some of the world's greatest literature. The man received praise for his translations of these great works, even when his translation was similar to previous translations or a translation of something written in English to begin with. It seems to be a shot at writers who do not generate original content, but, instead, regurgitate things that others have already done.



## Discussion Question 1

Why does the man in *Welcome to Camp Fantastic* want to run a camp for gifted teens? Is this a generous act, or does the man have selfish motivations?

## Discussion Question 2

In *Constructive Criticism*, why does the boy think that his advice to his father is useful? Is his advice accurate? Why is the father annoyed by his son's ideas? How does the writer compare the father and the son at the end of the book?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Audetat become famous for translating great literature? How does he do this? Why is his work so well received? What is the author's purpose in this story?

## Vocabulary

nonlocality, quantum, discussing, discussion, ultimately, translation, declared, effortlessly, timelessness, inexorably, imagined, emblematic, publication, faithful, contemporary, frightening, grotesque, shivered, unfamiliar, scarcely, material, fortuitously, gliding, amorphous, literally, procrastination, loveliest, ambush



# Characters

## The Hare from The Rematch

The hare is an animal from the fable, The Hare and the Tortoise. The hare is humiliated by the race it lost to the tortoise. As the hare watches the tortoise enjoy its fame from their previous race, the hare suffers every day and blames his downfall on the race. For this reason, the hare suggests a new race. The tortoise agrees, but nothing really changes when the hare wins the second race because it is, after all, what is supposed to happen.

## Tim from No One Goes to Heaven to See Dan Fogelberg

Tim is only nine when his grandmother dies. He naively promises to see her in heaven. Therefore, when he dies more than sixty years later, he is surprised when his grandmother seems rather reluctant to interrupt her life to spend time with him. At the end, Tim is told by his grandmother that she was old when she met him, already partially dead. She was not really living then. However, she has found a new life in heaven and, although she has all the time she could want to live her life, she does not want to waste time on trivial things. Tim learns an important lesson from his grandmother when he hears her explanation.

## John Grisham from The Something by John Grisham

John Grisham is a bestselling American novelist. He writes a variety of things, but is best known for his legal thrillers. In this story, Grisham learns that his novel has been published with the wrong title. Grisham is angry about this mistake, but then realizes that a title is only a title and does not really have an impact on the success of the book.

## Tony Robbins from Walking on Eggshells

Tony Robbins was famous in the eighties and nineties for his self-motivation speeches. Robbins believed that a person could achieve anything they want if they simply focus on that goal and work to achieve it. The writer puts this theory to a test by creating a woman who wants Robbins to fall in love with her. Robbins agrees to help the woman achieve her goal despite the personal impact it will have on his life. However, the woman eventually comes to the conclusion that she does not want love to be an achievement and that she will never feel comfortable in Robbins' presence.



## **Sophia from Sophia**

Sophia is a robot who was designed to provide sex for a customer. Sophia is good at her job, but she wants to talk to the man afterward. She is also bored with her life, unhappy that she has little to do when her owner is gone. When Sophia becomes self-aware and falls in love with her owner, the first robot to be capable of such a thing, he takes her back to the company that made her. Sophia is confused and hurt by his action, but struggles to accept his reasons. Sophia makes international headlines and turns the scientific community on its ear, but suffers because she cannot be with the man she loves.

## **The Boy from Kellogg's**

The 11-year-old boy in Kellogg's is a typical boy who wants to push the boundaries his parents establish within the home. For this reason, he throws a fit when his mother refuses to buy him sugary cereal. The reader is not told why the mother agrees on this occasion, but the moment is a life changing one for the boy. The boy loses the contest offered on the box of cereal, but has money of his own that he decides to use to try to win with other boxes. When the boy does win, his parents tell him they cannot allow him to collect the money because he broke the rules by buying the cereal in the first place. The boy later learns that this is not their main motivation. The parents really stopped him from buying the cereal because his biological father is the vice-chairman of Kellogg's. This man, an essential stranger to the boy, offers to raise him as his own. At first, the boy does not think he could do such a thing, but when he realizes he no longer likes the rules under which his parents force him to live, he changes his mind.

## **The Man from The Man Who Posted Pictures of Everything He Ate**

The man in this story is a sad, lonely man. He posts pictures of everything he eats simply because he is lonely and he feels like he is sharing his meals with the people who follow his feed. This story touches on the uses of social media in the modern world and the ways in which they impact people's lives.

## **Old Man from A Good Problem to Have**

The old man bursts into a classroom and accuses the teacher of stealing a math problem he wrote multiple years before. The man, it turns out, wrote a math problem that is used in nearly every classroom around the country, one about two trains and when they will meet in the middle of their journey. The man wrote the problem when his wife boarded a train to meet him on his final journey home after the Second World War. As the reader reads the story, they soon come to realize that the man's anger is based



more on his grief for the woman he loves and has lost, rather than the problem itself. It is a sweet, poignant story that highlights the impact some things have on a person's life.

## **Willie from One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie**

This story is another look at how social media is used in the modern world. A group of friends think that Willie is in trouble because he often posts pictures and text about drinking to excess. In the end, however, the reader realizes that Willie is the most sober of the group of friends. Not only that, but Willie has matured into a kind, gentle man who cares a great deal about the people around him. In fact, Willie turns out to spend more time helping disadvantaged children than drinking.

## **Man from The Pleasure of Being Right**

The man in The Pleasure of Being Right had his heart broken when he was young. His friends and family told him that he would find happiness again one day. However, the man lay alone on his deathbed with the realization that he was never happy again. He was right. However, he died alone.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Planetarium from Dark Matter

A young man goes on a tour of the planetarium on his own because his friends partied without him the night before and did not wake early enough to go with him.

## Flourless Chocolate Cake from Julie and the Warlord

Julie and the Warlord share a piece of flourless chocolate cake in Julie and the Warlord even though the Warlord believes taking out the flour does not reduce the unhealthiness of the cake.

## Newspaper Ad from The Something by John Grisham

John Grisham wakes to find a full page ad in the local paper congratulating him for his new novel's success. However, the name of the novel is not the one he had intended for it to have.

## Red Shirt from All You Have to Do

A young man believes that the best way to find true love is to simply wear a red shirt.

## Mirror from The Impatient Billionaire and the Mirror for Earth

A billionaire creates a large mirror that is put in space so that people can see themselves both as an individual and as a society.

## Jar of Salsa from Missed Connections

A woman drops a jar of salsa while arguing with a young man who wants to carry one of her grocery bags home for her.

## Convertible from They Kept Driving Faster and Outran the Rain

A couple drives a convertible fast in order to outrun the rain on a Hawaii trip.



## **Calendar from The Man Who Invented the Calendar**

As the man invents the calendar, he continuously makes changes to it until it becomes the calendar most people use today.

## **Huckleberry Finn from The Ghost of Mark Twain**

Two men, one a teacher and one a publisher, argue over changes that should be made to the modern version of Huckleberry Finn.

## **Cereal from Kellogg's**

A boy wins one hundred thousand dollars in a contest from Kellogg's. However, when he tries to claim the prize, he learns that his biological father is the vice-chairman of Kellogg's.

## **Cups of Coffee from If I Had a Nickel**

A man thinks that if he could mass produce coffee and spill each cup he makes, he could make a decent living at it.

## **Lottery Ticket from Regret is Just Perfectionism Plus Time**

A grandfather's only regret as he lies dying is that he chose the wrong numbers the one time he bought a lottery ticket.

## **Kate Moss Pictures from Kate Moss**

A teen is told that if she looks at pictures of Kate Moss for four hours each day, she will become Kate Moss.



# Settings

## Los Angeles

Many of the stories are set in Los Angeles. One of the stories takes place on Mulholland Drive, the highway that goes into the hills above Los Angeles. Several take place in the valley of the city.

## Battle Creek, Michigan

Kellogg's takes place near and in Battle Creek, Michigan. When the boy goes to Kellogg's to claim his prize money, he meets his biological father here.



# Themes and Motifs

## Impact of Media on Teens

In the story, “Kate Moss”, the writer creates a character who is obsessed with Kate Moss. This teen stares at pictures of Kate Moss. When she spots Kate Moss on the street, she approaches her and asks how she became Kate Moss. The woman tells her to stare at pictures of her for four hours a day and she will become Kate Moss. The girl does and it happens as predicted. This is a tongue and cheek look at the influence the media has on young people today.

In another story, “Chris Hansen at the Justin Bieber Concert”, the author looks at how Chris Hansen’s job affects his personal life. Chris Hansen is a reporter who works on a show that identifies pedophiles. He is concerned that if he goes to a concert with his daughter it will have a poor impact on the people around him. In this way, the media affects his daughter’s ability to have a good time with her father and the assumptions of the people who will see Hansen at such a concert.

## Social Networks and Behavior

Social networking has changed the way in which people interact. In some of his stories, the author points out how behaviors are responded to and changed on social networking sites. In “One of These Days, We Have to Do Something About Willie”, friends assume Willie is drinking himself into an early grave. However, Willie appears to be the most together one of the group when they meet in Las Vegas for an intervention. The reader is left with the impression that Willie has been lying to keep up a façade of some sort.

Another story that touches on social networking and how it affects behavior is “The Man Who Posts Pictures of Everything He Ate”. This man is so lonely, that he would rather share his life with people who make fun of him than be alone. In “Julie and the Warlord”, the author takes a hit at the dating scene, showing the outrageous date between a clueless girl and a warlord who is known to have been the reason behind thousands of murders in the Congo, including those of young children. In “Missed Connections” a woman tries to find a man she took home with her from a grocery trip and never bothered to learn his name.

The internet and social networking sites have changed the way in which people interact with one another. The writer of these stories takes that idea and moves it forward a little, showing how ridiculous some of these behaviors can be and how damaging they can be, but he does it with humor and sarcasm, leaving the reader with an impression that might change the way they interact on these sites.



## Drive for Fame

Several stories in this collection deal with a drive for fame. In “Johnny Depp, Fame, and the Double-Decker Hollywood Tour Bus”, the author shows the lengths by which Johnny Depp would be willing to go to leave an impression on his fans. In “Sophia”, a man finds accidental fame and it leaves him wishing that he had made a different choice. In “Quantum Nonlocality and the Death of Elvis Presley”, Elvis fakes his own death because he no longer feels connected to the man he has become.

Fame is a drive that makes people do things they should not. However, for others it is a choice that leaves them having to decide what is more important in their lives. For the driver in “The Ambulance Driver”, a man decides that his own personal goals are more important than saving the lives of strangers. For Angel Echeverria in “Angel Echeverria, Comediante Superpopular”, fame is not as important as remaining true to his one successful act. In “The Vague Restaurant Critic”, being different is more important than being famous.

Others do not even understand their fame, such as the Duke of Earl in the story, “Everyone Was Singing the Same Song”. Finally, one man steals other people’s fame as his own in “J.C. Audetat, Translator of Don Quixote”. All these characters wanted fame, all these characters did something odd or unusual in an attempt to achieve fame or to escape it.



# Styles

## Point of View

The point of views in these stories various. Several of the stories use the first person point of view. However, the majority of the stories utilize the third person point of view.

The author uses only one character per story to narrate his stories. This makes it easier for the reader to keep track of whose head they are in. This also makes it easier for the writer to write super short fiction. The characters differ from story to story. In most of the stories, the reader gets a good sense of who the narrator is and how they think, but in others the reader never even learns their gender or hears many of their thoughts. The author, however, uses point of view in such a way that there is no confusion in any of the stories.

## Language and Meaning

The stories are all written from the point of view of a new and different character. Most of the stories are written from the point of view of American characters who all speak the simple, slang-filled English common there. However, there are a few stories in which foreign characters are the narrators. These stories use differences in their language, some including foreign words or phrases that the reader might not immediately understand.

The language of this book differs from story to story, but it all works within the framework of their particular story. The author uses language that is authentic to his characters and their culture. The author includes very little in his stories that a reader might not understand, though his language is so buried in satire that some readers might struggle with the ultimate theme of the stories.

## Structure

The book is divided into sixty three short stories. Some of these stories are as long as ten or twenty pages, but a lot of the stories are as short as a paragraph or two. The author breaks his stories up by page and title.



## Quotes

The first thing Tim did when he got to heaven was look for his wife.  
-- Tim (No One Goes to Heaven to See Dan Fogelberg)

**Importance:** Tim has promised that he will see his grandmother in heaven, but from the beginning it is clear that this is not a priority.

The title of the book is not The Something.  
-- John Grisham (The Something by John Grisham)

**Importance:** John Grisham turned in the manuscript of his book without giving it a title, but the editor mistakenly published it with the space holder Grisham put on the manuscript.

And yet school sucks. Everybody hates it. What's the difference? 'Rithmetic!  
-- Principal (Rithmetic)

**Importance:** The principal is explaining to his students why he thinks the school should no longer teach math.

I'm walking on eggshells,' I said. 'To impress you. Isn't that your thing?  
-- Female Narrator (Walking on Eggshells (or: When I Loved Tony Robbins))

**Importance:** The woman is trying to get Tony Robbins' attention so she walks on eggshells. This becomes symbolic later when she realizes she will always be uncomfortable in his presence because she will never be sure she is enough.

Just because so few people have ever done it, people assume it's this great thing they should be jealous of and should want to do, too.  
-- narrator (I Never Want to Walk on the Moon)

**Importance:** This begins the explanation of why the narrator thinks walking on the moon is not a thing he/she should want to do.

When we can say anything, what do we say?  
-- Nelson Mandela (The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela)

**Importance:** This is part of Nelson Mandela's ultimate joke on those roasting him.

The almost-legendary artist Christo was on the verge of completing a dream that he had held close through his entire career: to design an American roller coaster inspired by nothing less profound than life itself—life, the ultimate roller coaster.  
-- Narrator (MONSTER: The Roller Coaster)

**Importance:** This quote sets up the premise for the story and underscores the purpose



of the artists' work, explaining why he is later disappointed by the test group's chosen name for the roller coaster.

Because it needs the best icing.  
-- Mother (Kindness Among Cakes)

**Importance:** A mother implies to her child that carrot cake is the worst cake, so it needs the best icing.

If I had a nickel for every time I spilled a cup of coffee, I'd be rich.  
-- narrator (If I Had a Nickel)

**Importance:** This is the cliché that is the premise of the entire story.

But I work fast, and I work for free, and I'm everyone's best friend.  
-- Wikipedia Brown (Wikipedia Brown and the Case of the Missing Bicycle)

**Importance:** This is the main character's response in this tongue-in-cheek piece of flash fiction.

Basically, just drop everything, who cares.  
-- narrator (If You Love Something)

**Importance:** A cynical look at the saying, if you love something, let it go.

Rome, the city of legends, of conquerors, of history, of myth—this was where he bought batteries!  
-- narrator (Rome)

**Importance:** This shows the excitement of a retired man who recently moved to a town outside Rome.