



Half as Happy: stories

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A grieving couple rents a desperate landlord's house in an effort to recover lost intimacy. Twins are irrevocably separated by events both beyond and within their control. A nighttime prank and its gruesome aftermath forge human connections no one could have anticipated.

The eight stories in *Half as Happy* reveal with startling clarity their characters' secrets, losses, and desires. Each with the depth of a novel, these insightful portraits of the darkness and light within us reverberate long after they've ended, like beautiful and disturbing dreams.

Half as Happy: stories Details

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Sarah says

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Author Gregory Spatz has assembled a collection of dense, intricate short stories in *Half as Happy*. While your average short story just gives you a sketch of who the characters are, or maybe feels like it could be part of a large work, Spatz's stories feel fully realized. His writing style is rich with detail and flows in an almost stream-of-consciousness sort of way, which can get a bit overwhelming at times, but which serves the narrative voice of the story very well.

While some of the characters aren't even given names, you still feel like you wind up knowing them, warts and all. Even when you get little backstory on the characters, you feel like you know what makes them tick -- at least, as well as the characters themselves know, which oftentimes isn't that well. The characters are not often ones who have a great deal of self awareness, and if they do, that doesn't mean they understand the other people in their lives any better.

The people Spatz writes about are not exactly people in peak condition. They are dysfunctional, desperate, delusional. They are cheaters and liars, they are seeing their relationships crumble before their eyes. They are grief-stricken or ill or on the cusp of divorcing. Not one story focuses on people who really have their act together. A number of the stories felt far too close to home for me sometimes: the lonely soon-to-be ex-spouses, each looking on at the other post-break-up with a degree of desire for the life the other now has; the young couple moving into a new home to try to recapture a connection that they've lost. The characters may be lost and dysfunctional, but they are very, deeply human.

All of the stories save one ("The Bowmaker's Cats") are set in a realistic, fairly straight-forward contemporary world. "The Bowmaker's Cats" has a touch of magical realism about it as you find yourself wonder what, exactly, happened, what does it all mean, when you get to the end. The rest of the stories show you snippets of lives, relationships gone wrong, things taken too far. It's a fascinating look at less-than-perfect people, many of whom you still find yourself rooting for anyway.

Enter the Rafflecopter below for a chance to win *Half as Happy* to experience Spatz's detailed, sometimes disorienting, worlds for yourself. Open to anyone who can receive mail at an address in the US. Due to some sexual situations in the book, please enter only if you are 17 or older.

Natalie E. Ramm says

Half as Happy is a group of short stories by Gregory Spatz that encompasses a variety of situations including the loss of a child, eating disorders, marriage in later years, twins separated at birth, and a group of youths getting into trouble. The stories are written with a beautiful almost dreamlike quality. They jump from scene to scene and never end quite where you would expect them. Though they can be hard to follow for lack of spacing and the stream of consciousness quality in some of the stories, Spatz is a capable and promising writer.

Link to my full review: <http://booksarethenewblack.com/2013/0...>

Ali Lafferty says

I feel like I didn't always understand as much as I should have about the stories, but I really liked these. I liked how they all focused on a sort of duality, and how they all had to do with finding and losing things. I especially liked *Half As Happy* and *String*, but all the stories were pretty good. Not sure if I would read anything else by this author but this was a nice little collection.

Lori L (She Treads Softly) says

My one regret while reading *Half as Happy* by Gregory Spatz is that I didn't have the time to savor the stories and the writing quite as much as it deserves to be appreciated. This collection of eight short stories is expertly wrought with a great attention to details and descriptions. It's the kind of collection that could turn anyone into a fan of the art of the short story.

The collection includes:

"Any Landlord's Dream" concerns a couple who rent a house in the attempt to help them recover from a great loss.

In "Happy For You," an older woman contemplates her life during a very early morning call from a son

"No Kind of Music" concerns a failed relationship

"Luck" is about a couple on an Alaskan cruise.

"The Bowmaker's Cats" is about a bow maker and disappearance.

"A Bear For Trying" is about twins and their connection to each other.

"Half as Happy" is about a wife who is losing too much weight.

"String" is about a group of good kids who did something wrong.

Of course, none of these descriptions come close to capturing the magic in these melancholy, complex stories. Their beauty lies in the completeness of the characters. They are fully realized, even in these short stories. The detailed descriptions add to the intricate stories. Don't expect cheerful outcomes where everything turns out for the best in the end. Even when the outcome seems good, or at least acceptable, there are still compromises that are made and burdens that must be born. The characters may not even be aware of their flaws and foibles. They are, all of them, dysfunctional and emotionally stunted, but very human and hurting.

Very Highly Recommended

Disclosure: I received an advanced reading copy of this book from the publisher and TLC for review purposes.

Morninglight Mama says

If you're looking for sunshine and joy, this is not the collection of short stories for you. But, if you're wanting a reading experience with depth, these eight tales will wow, all linked by common themes of disenchantment, loss, and a depth of human emotions. While there is no abundance of joy in this collection, the beauty here is to be found in the sorrow and the complexities of each tale. Though the stories are short, they are to be savored. Too often, I found myself rushing through, propelled by the emotion, but I forced myself to go back and truly feel each sentence, for Spatz is at the top of his craft here, and he is a master with words. Pick this up for a deeply affecting read, a small package with a big impact.

Tim says

Loved losing myself in Spatz's long dexterous sentences.

Tim says

Very promising collection, and I say that as a reader who doesn't generally care for short stories. Spatz is a terrific writer, and pretty insightful--I thought he was particularly intelligent about the randomness of life. I hope he writes a novel; I would certainly read it.

Sara Habein says

You know a book is good if you only stop reading so that you can tell the author, at 1 AM via Facebook, how much you are enjoying it. The evening I began reading it, I'd plans to watch *Doctor Who*, which, if you know me, is *serious business*. I thought I would read a little, then turn on the TV. No, I kept reading. Let it be known: Gregory Spatz's new story collection, *Half as Happy*, is a wonderfully gratifying little book.

This is the passage, from the story "Happy For You," that had me thinking, *Jesus, this guy is good at opening paragraphs*, and that's when I jumped online to tell him so:

For the moment, she is asleep — an ethereal gray sleep, something like the color of brain matter or of wet cement at dawn, or of the light seeping across her ceiling. A window fan at the foot of her bed whisks air into the room — wet, early spring air — furls and unfurls it around her, keeping her aloft in her dreams.

[...]The phone rings, jerking her from this gray ethereality, aches in her joints and muscles all previously dissolved out of reason magically reasserting themselves.

(My full review can be found at [Glorified Love Letters](#).)

Tracy Robertson says

I hated the authors run on and on and on paragraphs! One paragraph often took up more than an entire page, and it wasn't easy on the eyes. While the topics of each story sounded so interesting to me, I was always disappointed by the author losing focus on what was going on, and obsessively over-describing every little detail, no matter how loosely it related to the story. The title story "Half as Happy" was by far the best in this collection to me, and if not for that, I would have given the book one star. But even that disappointed me in the end by just ending, and not telling me what happened.

Bookkaholic Magazine says

(See our full review over at Bookkaholic.) Spatz plays around, as his title suggests, with ideas of halves and doubles. His characters live with a constant sense of incompleteness, as if there is always someone or something missing from their lives; they may not be half as happy as they dream they could be, but they muddle through in the real world, looking for second chances where they can. The author has an intimate understanding of the lives and motivations of ordinary people.

Sybil says

Gregory Spatz's short story collection HALF AS HAPPY brings generosity but also ruthless attention to language and structure to each story. Each sentence reveals Spatz's attention to rhythm and character. The longer stories unfold at a leisurely pace, but readers are rewarded with endings that resonate long after reading. The stories, linked according to images and themes, work together as cohesive collection. The opening story, "Any Landlord's Dream" establishes the nuanced attention to relationships that the rest of the stories also develop. The final story "The String," ends on an elegiac note that delivers an emotional depth and complexity. These stories will linger long after you finish them. Highly recommended

Lisa Eckstein says

The stories in this collection focus on familiar emotions and relationships between people, and they tend toward the introspective, with many examples of characters mulling over their lives and past events and where they went wrong. This is the kind of story that tends to be depressing, but there were also great moments of humor throughout.

As with any collection, I liked some stories better than others. My favorites were the first and last in the book. "Any Landlord's Dream" is about a marriage faltering after a loss. In "String", a single bad decision impacts a set of strangers, altering the course of their lives. It happens that both these stories make good use of multiple points of view, which is probably one reason they appeal to me.

This was an interesting collection for me to read as a writer, because while the subject matter is the same sort of individual turmoil that I choose for my own stories, Spatz has a very different writing style than mine,

featuring long, dense paragraphs crammed with details. This summer, Spatz was the leader of a workshop where I had a story critiqued, and it was quite an honor to get feedback from this accomplished writer. Now in studying his stories, I'm learning even more.

PacaLipstick Gramma says

I received this from a Goodreads Giveaway.

The several short stories in this book are quite lyrical and at times almost poetic. Personally, it was not I normally read, but the venue was a change of pace. Some of the stories were okay, some better. A lot of food for thought!

The writing is very good, but it was just not my kind of reading.

Casey says

Many writers have a distinct voice, which is a wonderful quality but can become monotonous in a short story collection where every character sounds the same. Spatz manages to inhabit a wild variety of characters in each of these stories, rendering each story a different experience. I found that rather than plow through them all in one go, I had to read just one at a time, allowing myself to savor a story and mull over it before moving on to the next one.

Claudia Putnam says

--Upgrading to 5 stars because this has stayed with me over time.

It's always hard to rate a story collection exactly, because some pieces are 5 and others are maybe 3, and even the 3s have some 5-star moments. And sometimes it's just a matter of what strikes you at a particular moment or period in your life. Overall I loved this book. The writing is clean and sparkling and yet has emotional slam. I dog-eared many, many pages.

In the first story, a woman deeply loves the man she is about to marry, but is stopped, temporarily, by his smell. Just something is off about it, enough to tell her he is not exactly right for her. It's at the level of instinct, and not even a powerful instinct. And yet she and her lover have told one another that you build a life together based on commitment and caring, not runaway passion, which mature people realize is childish and unreliable. And when has her instinct ever led her down the right path, where men are concerned?

Ain't that the truth? And yet... *don't* you want to be more than instinctive, don't you want choose someone based on character, and reliability, and general goodness? This man is all those things. He's even attractive, a good lover.

The story is about way more than this; I just happened to have dog-eared this page, among several others. How do you *know*? And once you do know, then what?

In another story, Happy for You, a mother struggles to be bigger-hearted than most of us reasonably can be, as her grown son calls for the recipes, the special holiday foods she always used to make. He wants to make them for his partner, and for his father, who is visiting with his new wife and children. During the phone conversation, in which the son tries to get what he needs from the mother, because he probably won't from the father, the son says several cruel things to her, which she may or may not deserve, and which she tries to absorb.

Some of us, who may be divorced, who may have children who long for a closer connection with their fathers, may relate to this story....may feel surprised and gratified at how true it rings.

The story No Kind of Music is a long, wonderful, beautiful, heartbreaking meditation on loneliness. It doesn't miss a step. I would know.

And the title story is lovely, too.

Rock on, Mr. Spatz.
