



Night Terrors: Sex, Dating, Puberty, and Other Alarming Things

Ashley Cardiff

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From getting kicked out of Bible study to metaphysics with strippers—a misanthrope's wickedly witty observations about the ridiculous, raunchy, and frequently disturbing impulses that propel human existence.

With the wit of David Sedaris and the analytical sharpshooting of Sloane Crosley, Ashley Cardiff spares no one—least of all herself—in an absurd and relentlessly funny journey of sexual development.

Cardiff reflects on her introverted, awkward and too-smart teenage years to her slightly bolder (but still uncomfortable) adult relationships, all while exploring the rich anthropological terrain of sex and love. Expounding on dating Mormons, the inherent weirdness of adolescent development, sexual nightmare-fantasies about Prince, family members' sex tapes, and narrowly avoiding a teenage orgy, Cardiff recognizes sexuality for the anxiety-making force it is. Weaving adept analysis with hilarious anecdotes, she goes for something much deeper than a rant, crafting satire that's as smart as it is ruthless.

Delivering fresh, unapologetic views from the perspective of a precise and ferociously irreverent young female writer, *Night Terrors* is a rollicking manifesto on the agonies of modern life and love.

Night Terrors: Sex, Dating, Puberty, and Other Alarming Things Details

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From Reader Review Night Terrors: Sex, Dating, Puberty, and Other Alarming Things for online ebook

Matthew says

At some point, I'm going to stop falling for the reviews that liken an author to someone else, especially if it's a famous author known for witty, funny writing. Falling for the comparisons to David Sedaris, I grabbed this book off the advanced reader stack at work, thinking that a funny book about sex has to be a good read.

Unfortunately, someone forgot that David Sedaris is funny, witty, edgy and erudite. I say unfortunately because Cardiff is none of these. In fact, as the author even mentions in the latter parts of the book, this book about sex has very little to do about sex. The author even lambasts other writers who casually toss off the word fuck and then declare themselves edgy and bracing...which is exactly what Cardiff does throughout most of the book.

That is not to say that there weren't brilliant stretches in the writing. The story of meeting the Mormon's parents was fantastic. Also, I could relate all too well to the author's issues with verbal diarrhea when speaking to a gay or lesbian friend and trying to say you're fully supportive of their lifestyle, and then you go a little too far. That also was fun. I've been there. It was nice to see someone else who could put my awkwardness into words.

These episodes are few and far between. The beginning of the book, in which the author relates her recurring nightmares of being chased by Prince on a tricycle, hinted at a fun ride through the pitfalls and pratfalls of growing older, dealing with sex, and becoming an adult. The book quickly spirals into a long, wordy therapy session for the author out of which she emerges as imperious, pointing out in several cases where she is a much better human being than anyone reading her book. The tone of the book was very off-putting, which soured even the occasional funny anecdote from her life. I wish I could have liked this book, but by the end I was just happy to have finished it so that I could return the advance copy to work. In the future, I'll just leave the David Sedaris-like writing to David Sedaris.

Abby Huff says

This book was NOT funny or witty and that was what I was expecting. I actually found it disturbing and scary. I lived through my own sex, dating, puberty, and other alarming things and reading about Ashley Cardiff's was not a good time.

Kirstän Seck says

The stories became progressively boring, and the author is so incredibly pretentious and up her own ass I couldn't handle it.

Stefanie says

If there's anyone out there insecure regarding their sexuality or still paying for therapy sessions thanks to the rollercoaster that is puberty - you NEED to read this book. Ashley's blunt, sarcastic yet very real account of growing up and dealing with everything from first loves, parents, sex tapes makes you feel as if you're not alone in discovering all of these things. Sex is a pretty big deal and it should be talked about as such. Her accounts of embarrassing situations made me feel great, because I know I've had my fumbles with these things as well. Forget Cosmopolitan magazine and the like - this book is a must read.

Eris says

I was skeptical about picking this up, while I am a fan of the dark and realistic I am no fan of needless snark. This book was a pleasant surprise.

This will definitely NOT be for everyone. If you are squeamish about your body, your sex history, your neurosis or your ability to face yourself honestly then you will want to give it a miss.

She speaks openly and honestly about a great many things, most of them WILL make you uncomfortable on some level. However, she speaks about the things most of us have to deal with (in the past, future or present) and she does so with humor and humility, traits that are not often paired. She owns her shortcomings, she faces her flaws, and she asks you to do the same. So if you aren't ready for that, again, this isn't for you.

I found parts laugh out loud funny, other parts made me twinge with recognition and sadness. It is not a feel good book, nor is it a downer book. It is a book about the human condition (in regards to its collective sexual identity and malfunctions). I found the content to be brave and funny and humble enough to avoid the Chelsea Handler comparisons (sorry, I just don't care for that lady).

Give it a shot when it comes out, I found it to be funny AND valuable in its social insight. This author has promise, one to watch for the future. A refreshing book that I hope gets adequate play in the market.

Laura says

Terrible... just terrible. Won't waste my time reviewing since i spent enough time reading this...

Gregory Goddard says

I had hoped that this book would be as funny as advertised. However I didn't find it funny, or even slightly amusing. It was pretty boring and I had to force myself to finish. I got this book free from good reads.

Laura says

2.5 Meh. I only chuckled a few times, the ramblingness of it didn't work for me (although I like that in some other books), and it was just blah. I almost didn't continue on after reading the first chapter or 2 because I just wasn't interested, but I did finish because it's VERY hard for me to quit books. Can't say I'm exactly glad I finished because of the book, but I'm glad I finished for my own accomplishment in not giving up haha!

Frizzella says

This is one of those books that I so badly wanted to love, but just couldn't. Like a poorly grilled & very grizzly steak, there was a lot of unwanted meat [a LOT of rambling on]. Out of the entire book, there were only about two times that I found myself actually laughing. I guess I should have known, there's no way that someone could write an entire 200-some page book on "funny" sexual thoughts and experiences throughout their life. I must say, Cardiff is quite funny in the way that she explains some things happening, but almost to the point that it was moving along at way too slow of a pace for me. Also, don't read this book if you're squeemish over anything related to sex, Cardiff doesn't hold back, and gets graphic a time or two.

Laura says

This might have been a humorous account of the author's growing up and experiences with puberty and all that entails, but I failed to see it. Instead, this read like any other account, with what I'm guessing were supposed to be wry comments and truths that didn't really translate. The use of profanity and crudeness (the cousin-with-pencil episode, for example) weren't shocking, merely boring and didn't illuminate anything for me. A DNF.

ARC provided by publisher.

Faith Anderson says

I got this as a free copy from a good reads giveaway. This book is ALL about sex, so if you are at all squeamish about fairly sordid details (not always involving the author) this book is not for you.

I personally found some of the stories interesting and at times hilarious. The author is very open, honest, and forth coming with her stories. It was a little much for my own tastes, but it was an ok read.

Katie says

I only got about 55 pages into this, so this review may not be representative of the book. I started it late at night when I was tired and between books, so it wasn't at the top of my list to hurry up and read.

i love biographical humorous essays, but these were more whiny/sad/pitiful than humorous. The author casts

herself as an outcast outright, so that makes it somewhat hard to get into the spirit of the stories.

Hilary says

Copy received through Goodreads' First Reads program.

For would-be authors without the energy, attention, or structure to write a full-on memoir, there is always the David Sedaris-style Collection Of Autobiographical Essays route, which allows comedians (Adam Carolla, Marc Maron, Chelsea Handler, etc.) to publish books of their oft-told tales of Something Crazy That Happened to Them Circa 1987, or nascent writers/bloggers (Sloane Crosley, Ms. Cardiff) to write their tales and thoughts in bite-size pieces.

Ashley Cardiff is certainly a better and funnier writer than Sloane Crosley, though that's a low hurdle to jump (or step) over, like making a pizza better than Elio's. Like every memoirist of the past decade, she wrings several stories out of Not Fitting In and Having An Embarrassing Family, which are such well-worn tropes that I'm eagerly awaiting a memoir by a popular person, just to mix it up a bit. Cardiff identifies this as a "sex memoir," although that makes this sound far more prurient than this book actually is, which she concedes towards the very end with a self-aware shot at books about sex where sex is "conspicuously absent." It's more a series of chronological stories ranging from childhood confusion over sex to a series of fairly tame dating stories, with plenty of space left for whatever rant she'd like to get into along the way.

Cardiff can be clever at times, with sentences like, "Tangentially, the word 'lovemaking' is a terrific example of things horrible people say," or "college kinds are actually deeply uncreative when it comes to behaving badly. They mostly just drink and [have sex] and discover things like Bret Easton Ellis and psilocybin, which they grow out of if they're decent in any meaningful capacity," but too often, her stories just aren't that compelling and rely on making mountains out of, say, something much smaller than mountains. For example, in an essay on how a paramour's parents can make dating difficult, she describes the parents of a Mormon beau as "the greatest source of grief from a significant other's parent I've ever encountered," and then tells a story about how they forced her to go to church once and weren't happy when they first met because she said she cooked their son breakfast sometimes. Simply calling something "the worst" or "the most embarrassing" isn't sufficient to generate gravitas, and stories like this smack of a lack of life experience, which is a difficult thing for a memoir to overcome. (And yes, there's even a self-referential aside about this too, mocking "memoirs written by twentysomethings who haven't lived in any discernible way.")

As the collection continues into Cardiff's college years, the writing and stories improved and the jokes landed a lot more frequently, as her voice and character felt more established and confident. Still, the repeated self-referential asides became a bit grating (after assuring us all of these stories are true, she admits that her ex-boyfriend "The Mormon" wasn't actually all that religious, and she takes a break to assure us that she's totally accepting of religions after multiple stories indicating the exact opposite), and the lack of a consistent voice or tone often obscures whatever point these essays had in mind. Cardiff wants to be sassy, cruel, cold, analytical, and insightful, but she also wants to make her self-indulgent analyses somehow relevant to others by adding a few trite lines like "You don't date by type and love is as much a learned trait as it is something that exists instantaneously." This advice, shoehorned into stories about a college kid dating the wrong person, is neither helpful nor original, and it's hard to give advice in a story premised on the fact that you didn't know what you were doing at the time. (Also, if the advice is that, as a teenager, you may not always date the right people: duh.)

I enjoyed moments of this, but there's a reason so many memoirs involve addiction, celebrity, poverty, or childhood abuse - those lives have a built-in compelling storyline. Stories about growing up well-to-do in Northern California, going to a liberal arts college, or Moving To New York aren't compelling, and as such, the writing would have to be consistently hilarious to make up for the narrative shortcomings, and it isn't. This feels like a book by a blogger who's talented in that short-form, free, low-expectation medium, but her writing doesn't quite translate to book form. Still, for upper middle class white kids with worthless undergrad degrees who are in their twenties and thirties and aren't easily offended, there are some laughs to be had here.

Jill says

Just finished the chapter "Gay Anxiety". Cardiff thinks she has carte blanche to say "faggot" whenever she wants because her boyfriend used to have sexual relationships with men. To her, this is like an interracial couple being racist - she and them can't possibly be bigots, because look who they're dating! I guess, then, it's okay for a straight man in a relationship with a woman to use misogynistic language? I mean, he can't be an asshole, he has a girlfriend!

I'll finish the book since I'm half done, but so far, Cardiff is not impressing me.

Update: Finished the book. Apparently the only qualifications you need to get a book deal nowadays is to be a white girl with a liberal arts education living in NYC. Yawn.

karen says

ashley cardiff is the midpoint of funny between sloane crosley (emphatically unfunny) and jenny lawson (piss-yourself funny). and why am i only pitting her against other female humor writers and not being all gender-equality and letting her play rough with the humor-boys? because i am. and if you're gonna get on my case about it, you are probably yourself utterly humorless.

the book's a mixed bag - when she is good, she is very good. and there are things in here to which i can definitely, and unfortunately, relate.

...I eat like I should be wearing a helmet when I'm unsupervised...

ermm...

...Jesse was obsessed with Bruce Lee, which is a pretty cool obsession to have. He kept in shape by practicing Jeet Kune Do in his room while listening to electronica. If that doesn't turn you on, you are probably not a sixteen-year-old girl.

replace that with king fu and shudder to think, and it rings a bell.

*To provide a more succinct portrait of how broke I was then, right around that time I saw a man walking down the street eating two Twix bars side by side out of the wrapper - **as if they were one candy bar** - and I thought it was the truest expression of luxury I had ever seen.*

dude, that *still* sounds like luxury to me, and i'm not broke.

and she occasionally has very astute things to say:

It takes a certain amount of adulthood to realize that being honest doesn't make you good, it just makes you honest. You can be completely open and direct about your flaws but it doesn't absolve you of them. Hopefully we can agree that lying is awful, but it's important to add that being frank about your own awfulness doesn't make you less awful. It makes you easier to identify.

and

college kinds are actually deeply uncreative when it comes to behaving badly. They mostly just drink and fuck and discover things like Bret Easton Ellis and psilocybin, which they grow out of if they're decent in any meaningful capacity,

and it is, ostensibly, a book about sex, but if you are looking for a lurid chelsea handler type book about "things i have drunkenly shoved in my vagina," it isn't this. this is not shock value tales of intercourse. it's just frequently funny stories about being shy and awkward and young and easily impressed. and the eye-opening crash-to-earth that happens when young romantically awkward girls start to see shit as it is, and not the way books tell you it is.

I stared at him throughout that entire first class and could not believe his cheekbones. It was a real infatuation at first sight and one that persisted even when he spoke. The first time I heard his voice was when our extremely urbane German sociology professor was tasked with answering a stood question about evolution. He mentioned, offhand, the lemur.

"Oh, yeah!" the beautiful one exclaimed, "Like aye-ayes."

"Pardon me?" said the professor.

"Like those aye-aye things in Madagascar. Natives kill them because they think they're, like, demons."

*The professor looked at him silently, straightened his glass and returned to talking about real things. In retrospect, this interaction revealed nothing appealing about him, but at the time I sat there in class drawing hearts on my notepad as my own swelled with thoughts of **He likes animals!** In this way, teenage girls have no survival skills and are unequipped for the world.*

to my mind, what makes funny people funny is a lack of inhibitions. not the lack of inhibitions of the "i have slept with everyone i have ever met" variety, but a lack of vanity that says "yeah, this is me, sometimes i fuck up, and it's funny." and while she does relate embarrassing things here, it still seems like she is being careful. she is almost too *nice* to be truly hilarious. coming out of homeschooling, she is shy, tall, and awkward, squeamish about certain things, and a little judgey. but what saves her is that she knows when she is being judgey, and she owns it. just like she deflects a lot of things with humor, and speaks to her own imagined critics by pointing out all the ways in which she is guilty of the very things she is herself criticizing. it is seemingly an ingrained defense mechanism, but it is usually cute enough to pass.

it isn't always laugh-out-loud funny, but it's worth a read (but skip the stripper story) and she will probably get better as she gains confidence and ditches her attachment to the words "deeply" and "tangentially."

this review does it better than me:

a point of interest - in the acknowledgments, she says

Strangely and unexpectedly, most of all: enormous gratitude to my dear friend Ben Lansky, who one day a few years ago in a yellowing stairwell was the first person to ever tell me I was funny. It surprised me at the time but I gave it a shot.

and that is what happens in our bloggy world when boys compliment pretty girls on something other than being pretty. they just run with it...

come to my blog!
