

An Appraisal of Kelcey Parker's 'For Sale By Owner' | CultureMob

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by Gemma Alexander | 03/28/12 |

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It's easy to think of short story collections as appetizers or bonbons – an assortment of tasty, bite-sized treats that wouldn't make a meal. If you tend to consider short stories to be literary snacks, then the stories in Kelcey Parker's book, *For Sale By Owner*, published by [Kore Press](#), are more like tapas. They may look like hors d'oeuvres from the world of stay-at-home moms and their domestic difficulties, but when you bite into them you discover rich, savory morsels that stay with you long after you've moved on to the next bar.

These are not light stories. Parker manages in only a few pages to achieve an emotional weight that many novels lack. I laughed out loud reading the beginning of "Domestic Air Quality," a stay-at-home mom's air quality journal for a consumer products survey. Although it's obvious from the first page that the story won't really be about air quality, I still cried when I got to the real issue. Later, I walked around with Maugham, the disaffected mom of teens, stuck in my head for days before I could move on to the next story.

The title story differs from the others in the book, because its protagonist knows exactly how much to value what she has in life. The women in the other stories are still negotiating how much their lives are worth, trying to fix a value relative to what was sacrificed, to what others have, to what they thought they would get in exchange for the person they used to be. It's a theme that could easily get grim, but Parker manages to approach it playfully.

She plays with the very shape of her stories. In addition to the consumer research survey, Parker presents a publisher's press release for "Biography of Your Husband." Near the end of "Tom's Story," an experiment that almost doesn't work, I glanced forward to confirm that I was almost finished. Then I read the next sentence.

The reader (who has anyway checked the length before committing to the piece, and who even now spies the field of white space beyond the dense woods of words) senses that the story is approaching, if not a resolution, an end.

This made me laugh out loud again, the awkwardness in this not-a-story forgiven.



Parker plays with words, agilely and deftly, like a juggler. She rolls them up her arm, across her shoulders and down the other side, tosses them up in the air with her elbow, and snatches them as they fall back down. In fact, "Falling" may actually be about semantics, although it's hard to say for certain. Like Kurosawa's later films, Parker's stories aren't always, or maybe ever, about what they're about. The subject almost doesn't matter, because the way she twists and flips the words engenders the same kind of awe as watching a tiny pre-teen gymnast on the high bars, or a stage magician making a silver dollar disappear. Except that ultimately, the subject does matter, because unlike the magic trick, unlike the bonbon, *For Sale By Owner* has substantial value.

For Sale By Owner is available in bookstores now, or from the [Kore Press website](#), priced \$16.



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