



After the Gazebo

stories by Jen Knox

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*Jen Knox*

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“Jen Knox writes the healthy fiction equivalent of the detox smoothie you’d get if you poured half a cup of Mary Gaitskill, two tablespoons of Mary Robison, a teaspoonful of Raymond Carver, and some chilly Laura van den Berg into a Tom Waits blender and hit puree. Here are twenty-four darkly fun stories populated by everyman and everywoman genetically predisposed to ‘tough luck but hopeful genes,’ and primed for fight or flight. And yet she has the uncanny ability to make you root for even her most unredeemed characters in all of their stressed out glory. All of them inhabitants of our lonely damaged universe, searching for connection in the daily grind of everyday losses.”

—Richard Peabody, editor Gargoyle Magazine

“The perfect pitch, the flawless diction, and the aura of calm are all grace notes with which Jen Knox cloaks the troubled waters of the human heart. A Knox tale begins in a recognizable place, but in every one of these brilliant stories, she confounds the reader’s expectations and ends them in eerily beautiful, untrod territory. The stories in *After the Gazebo* seduce yet refuse what is coarse; they disdain the slipknot of the obscene, and still they electrify. Exquisite and edgy, they quietly shock. The reader bestows a rock solid trust in this narrator’s voice and is willing to linger with the energy drinks and flat-screen TVs, the 12 Steps, the cubicles and performance reviews, the bus rides and DMV’s eye tests. This author does not hide behind the exotic but with great skill and generosity braves the commonplace. These stories go fathoms deep—all the way to the shivery core, where the familiar heightens into the sublime, and then into the dazzling. The perceptible world has been sorely neglected in fiction, perhaps waiting for a writer with the craft and courage to take it on. Jen Knox is that writer. *After the Gazebo* is that book.”

—Stephanie Dickinson, author of *Love Highway*

“*After the Gazebo* is a wonder: complex, compelling, beautifully told. Jen Knox writes with a deceptively quiet fierceness that will sneak up behind you and grab you by the throat, clutch your heart, and never let go. Her motley cast of characters find themselves caught at the fault line of before and after, tasked to challenge the veracity of whether “a person can’t start over if he’s always looking back.” The disparate ways they claw and fight, strive and fail to succeed are testament to Knox’s range and her deep understanding of the human condition. The stories in this accomplished collection will make you ache, will make you think, and will stay with you long after you turn the final page.”

—Sara Lippmann, author of *Doll Palace*

“Jen Knox’s *After the Gazebo* offers us an astounding panorama of torqued moments and vignettes that strike the depths and dimensions of human behavior. Each cautionary tale illuminates the next, reminding us of the uncanny impact that fate, luck and destiny have on our lives, and weaving all the necessary elements: “I never saw the value of negative space, but learned to live inside of it. With kids de-bussing around us and the cold biting our cheeks, we all knelt on the pavement and scratched lottery tickets.” Knox’s keen eye and heart are devoted to noticing every detail, infusing the most ordinary and subliminal experiences with

epiphanies that transcend her characters. The range and depth of each story in this collection is pitch-perfect, as the writer hits the marks, gripping us with vivid, familial and domestic landscapes that inform and widen our own lives—leave us all the richer for it. After the Gazebo is indelible and astonishing."

—Cynthia Atkins, author of *In the Event of Full Disclosure*

"Jen Knox is an incredibly versatile writer whose stories go down smooth and burn for days. Few people on the planet are both acute observers as well as superb prose stylists. Jen Knox is one of those rarities. And *After the Gazebo* is proof!"

—Mathieu Cailler, author of *Loss Angeles*

"With a clear lens pressed to her creative eye, Jen Knox has crafted a diverse collection of stories where loss, hardships, and tender vulnerabilities are stretched across the uncertain horizon of everyday life."

—Beth Hoffman, internationally bestselling author of *Looking for Me*

## **After the Gazebo Details**

Date : Published May 2015 by Rain Mountain Press

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Author : Jen Knox

Format : Paperback 182 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fiction, Literary Fiction

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## **From Reader Review After the Gazebo for online ebook**

### **Kaylee says**

creative, poignant and with a realistic feel, "After the Gazebo" is a literary delight that will appeal to many. There is a sense of loss and sadness, a somber tone that seems to permeate through many of the stories (intentional or not), and some are positive and uplifting, but all feel like "life". A fast read one that is easy to get lost in due to the author's strong literary skills. A treat for short-story lovers.

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### **Madeline Dyer says**

So, I loved this collection. It really is a gem. Each story felt like a real snapshot of someone's life, and the scenarios blended together a wide range of emotions (nostalgia, sadness, shock, a little humour, and hope) which kept me engaged and turning the pages. Jen Knox has a great grasp of style and tone; each story was unique and individual, and her wide use of registers and voices added real authenticity. My favourite stories were probably "The Suit" and "Types of Circus", though I really loved the almost prophetic style of "After the Gazebo".

Another thing that impressed me was just how adaptable Jen Knox is in her writing. She covered a wide uses of tenses, narrative persons and subjects--and managed to pull each one off to a satisfying and impressive level. This is a short story collection that I'd definitely recommend.

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### **Mathieu Cailler says**

A masterful collection. One that will live on my nightstand for a long time. Worthy of being read again and again.

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### **Jhonni Parker says**

This is an excellent book that captured my attention from the beginning, pulled me in, and never once let go. Each story was riveting, imaginative, and flowed smoothly from one to the next... never a "dull one" where you get bored or want to skip ahead... you really just want to keep going from one character and event to the next. The descriptions were very strong, and I mean with the author's word choice... unique and powerful. I felt like I was genuinely inside the characters' world experiencing life through their eyes, for better or worse. I would love to read more from this author in the future. She has a natural gift for creating a well-thought out, emotional stories and memorable characters.

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### **Darla says**

WARNING...when starting "After the Gazebo" make sure you don't have anywhere you need to be or anything you need to do because you won't want to stop reading until you've finished it all!! Trust me on

this! I was going to just read a few stories, but then I just kept going and want to read the next, and then the next. The book starts off strong, and has stronger stories than others, and some are a bit ‘different’, very literary, not so much a plot, per say, but more of an ‘emotion’ or ‘experience’. The characters are impressively fleshed out for such limited space. I think what I liked the most about this book was just the overall feel the author managed to create where it felt intimate and authentic. There are some sad twists and some parts that really catch you off guard... but that just made the book even more amazing. Recommend.

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### **Elizabeth Brown says**

I think that Jen Knox may have made a short-story fan out of me! I’ve always had a bit of an aversion to them, mostly because I like to feel a deeper connection to the characters and stay in their world for a while. I’m big on the escapism of reading. But I was surprised how effective the author was in totally transporting us to another time and place and where we can really experience another’s lives (or a brief segment of it) enough to see a twist that catches us off guard. There was a good amount of details and lyrical prose that added to the scenery without bogging it down any. Good pacing overall, near perfect editing. Very impressive and I’ll happily read more from Ms. Knox when her next book is available...hopefully soon!

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### **CJ says**

Make no mistake, “After the Gazebo” is definitely a compelling read, and one that will appeal to a wide range of readers due to its variety of stories. this book covers so many things, yet it all fits well together in a unique blend of family, life, and drama, and the human experience. Each story really had its own personality and message, but all blended together nicely. One thing I particularly liked was how we really felt like we were part of the story as it unfolded, instead of it just being “told” to us, on the outside looking in.. We feel like we are a part of the book and I recommend for fans of literary fiction who’d like a new twist on life.

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### **Marcella Gonzales says**

#### 4.5 stars

Hat’s off to the author Jen Knox for doing something that many writers fail to do—tell good stories! It’s especially hard to do so in fewer pages than a whole novel, and despite what one may think (due to shorter length), it is actually quite difficult. I know because I’m a writer too. Your writing must be tight, focused, to the point, but also able to convey enough descriptions and actions to get the reader engaged right away. No easy task! What Ms. Knox is able to do in less than a dozen pages with the impact of emotion and intrigue, many writers can’t do at all... It’s weird because the stories it may seem simple but there are more complexities to be discovered, and things are rarely what they first seem. I feel like I could go on and on, but really just read the first few stories and see if you aren’t hooked... Best suited for older teens and adults due to the nature of the subject matters. Highly recommended!!!

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### **Laura says**

I generally reserve my more effusive praise for long, epic novels that I feel have completely consumed me

and hijacked my brain and soul for a time, not usually shorter books that I read in an evening. But today I will be making an exception with “After the Gazebo” by Jen Knox, a short story collection that tells of different lives of people in state of change, and some with dark circumstances reflective of human nature. Yet even the darker stories are somehow beautiful, poetic and touching. I was surprised by the amount of emotion and investment the author manages to pull from the reader in just a few pages. Sign of a gifted writer there. Will definitely be checking out works from Ms. Knox in the future, and will recommend to my friends.

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### **Claire says**

It's always kind of hard for me to review short story collections because it's not like I can rate each one and it's plot/storyline individually, so I can just do an overall assessment about what I liked and didn't like on the whole thing. I enjoyed the author's voice and narrative. The editing was flawless. The stories were all very interesting, and unique in their own right. What I didn't like was sometimes there was a “distant” feel, where I felt the story was being “told” to us and we weren't a part of it. Also, a few endings felt too abrupt to me with no resolution. Just my personal preference. But overall a quality collection that will appeal to fans of lit fiction.

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### **Steve Lindahl says**

The stories in Jen Knox's *After the Gazebo* are eclectic, but unified in tone. They are stories of people who have been beaten up by a hard world, but have been left with a sense of hope. Sometimes the characters make bad decisions, but often these are tales of circumstances that build up and overwhelm. The subjects include topics such as substance abuse, the problems of aging, abusive relationships, raging storms, car accidents, and so many others. But the writing is character oriented with the focus not on what happens as much as it is on how it impacts the people.

Knox's writing style is wonderful. Here are a couple of first sentences:

From *Disengaged*:

*The closest I've come to a passionate encounter in the last two decades was with Henry, and he died soon after we met.*

From *Types of Circus*:

*The last day I saw Michelle, she weighed 325.2 pounds.*

Both of these sentences captured me as soon as I read them. In the first case the death draws me in. In the second the .2 pounds intrigues me. I could go on and on with examples of how Knox subtly and carefully holds her readers' attention.

Two stories in the collection are particularly intriguing because they may or may not be connected. These are *Scratching the Silver* and *Lying to Old Men*. Both are about a man named Rattle who has a one night stand with an underage exotic dancer. The first one is written from Rattle's point of view. The second is from the point of view of the woman. But the stories play out in very different ways, leaving me wondering if they are about two different men with the same unusual name and affair, or about the same man with two different

dancers (she's named in the first story, but not in the second), or if this is a case of looking at the results of the same event with two very different choices. Knox placed *Scratching the Silver* early in the collection and *Lying to Old Men* late, so she wasn't pushing this connection. Still, if she did not want them to be considered as a pair, I believe she would have changed Rattle's name.

Both of the two "Rattle" stories stand own. In fact, according to the acknowledgments: *Scratching the Silver* first appeared in *Per Contra* and *Lying to Old Men* received finalist status for the 2013 Fulton Prize and was introduced in *The Adirondack Review*. But together they are even more powerful. Like all the stories in *After the Gazebo* they made me think and feel.

Steve Lindahl – author of *Motherless Soul* and *White Horse Regressions*

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### **Tabitha says**

First, I have to say that I don't normally read short stories, but I was looking for something a little out of my comfort zone and this book sounded intriguing and the writing was strong. Well, I am most certainly glad I took the chance on *AFTER THE GAZEBO* by Jen Knox! This was a brilliant book! Such strong, vivid writing, and the characters are all fascinating, flawed, and going through their own transitions and everything just felt "authentic" for lack of a better word. Dialogue, interactions, scenes, descriptions...All in all a very good read that I'd recommend even to those who don't normally read this sort of thing...try it, you'll be pleasantly surprised!

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### **Darlene Cupp says**

for me, I liked *After the Gazebo* because it has something of everything... seriously. Action, romance, drama, politics, struggles, deep issues that make us think...It just felt so human. I was impressed by the beautiful narrative prose, and while I'm not usually a fan of stories when there is little to no dialogue, when it happened here it worked well anyways... Always found myself reading for longer than I planned to, as there was never a story I wanted to just 'stop reading' when I was done. I believe this book will have wide ranging appeal, but is probably best suited for adults due to some mature themes and language.

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### **Sara says**

I blurb'd this one, with great pleasure - and said something like this:

*After the Gazebo* is a wonder: complex, compelling, beautifully told. Jen Knox writes with a deceptively quiet fierceness that will sneak up behind you and grab you by the throat, clutch your heart, and never let go. Her motley cast of characters find themselves caught at the fault line of before and after, tasked to challenge the veracity of whether "a person can't start over if he's always looking back." The disparate ways they claw and fight, strive and fail to succeed are testament to Knox's range and her deep understanding of the human condition. The stories in this accomplished collection will make you ache, will make you think, and will stay with you long after you turn the final page.

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### **Nicole says**

How to describe “After the Gazebo”, other than say it is by far one of the most creative, gritty, realistic, and well written books I’ve read in a long time! I have already loaned it to my mother to read, and my sister is right after her (it is right up their alley!) The author Jen Knox pulls us in to the story right from the opening story, and skillfully narrates an impressive variety of short-stories full of complex and deeply emotional issues. In my opinion it really is the characters who made this story so good, each so original and conflicted in their own way, and we pull for them throughout their personal journeys. A memorable read and a keeper for sure. Recommend for fans of literary fiction. Would love to read more from Ms. Knox in the future!

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### **Stacy says**

it’s difficult to review a collection of some twenty-odd separate stories, covering a multitude of situations and social settings. But except for maybe 3 or 4, which I felt were either too “surreal” or “abstract” for me, (like when I finished it I wasn’t sure what the point was), they were all compelling stories that drew me in and engaged my senses. Interesting characters and skillfully described scenes make for a fast and delightful read. Recommend.

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### **Jenna says**

this book was great! “After the Gazebo” by Jen Knox is a collection of literary short stories. The style is difficult to master, telling a compelling story in not only a short amount of time and space, but doing so where the words create the artistic message and the actual narrative and prose is more important and powerful than the plot itself. This is not easy to do, but it seems that Jen Knox pulls it off with an elegant ease that makes you just want to keep reading more and more. Loved these stories, and even the ones I didn’t \*really\* love were still exceptionally well-written. Would definitely read more from this author in the future!

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### **Essie Harmon says**

#### 4.5 stars

this was the first book I’ve read by this author Jen Knox, but I certainly hope it’s not the last. She has a gift for writing descriptive and life-like scenes that bring the characters to life with natural sounding dialogue and good internal conflict. I like that this book and its stories didn’t feel stale or derivative of anything I’ve ever read before. It is a pretty fast read, but it covers a lot of territory and does it with remarkable depth considering the heavy subject matters on some. It is humorous, quirky, jaw-dropping, surprising, sad, and inspiring... all the qualities I look for in a good novel, and it delivered an emotional win. Recommended for mature readers.

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## **Nicola Flood says**

After *The Gazebo* by Jen Knox is hands down one of the most original and well-crafted books (collection of short stories) I've read in a long time! I was completely drawn in from the opening pages, and absolutely loved the author's use of description of the different scenery and locales, and attention to detail. We feel transported not only into the various characters' heads throughout the different stories, but the places they are, and it was a wonderful escape from reality. This book covers so, so much it's impossible to sum up, but it felt like I was reading several slices of real life, and it was interesting to see how it all tied together. A real literary treat. I was really impressed and would recommend this book with the highest of praise.

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## **Steph Coleman says**

4.5 stars-

At first I wasn't sure what I was getting myself into in deciding to read this book. Because admittedly I do tend to lean towards long, epic novels that I can really lose myself in. So short stories are not my usual fare. But I was intrigued by the writing sample and the way that I felt an almost immediate connection to not only the characters but with the way Jen Knox was writing them, and I found myself just wanting to read more... and more... and more. But seriously, I felt transported to another world just by experiencing the lives of these incredible characters who are so true to life and authentic, yet unlike any I've met before. Really glad I took a chance on this one...

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