



How They Met and Other Stories (Borzoi Books)

By David Levithan

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Just in time for Valentine's Day comes a confection from David Levithan that is sure to have fans of *Boy Meets Boy* eager to devour it. Here are 18 stories, all about love, all kinds of love. From the aching for the one you pine for, to standing up and speaking up for the one you love, to pure joy and happiness, these love stories run the gamut of that emotion that at some point has turned every one of us inside out and upside down.

What is love? With this original story collection, David Levithan proves that love is a many splendored thing, a varied, complicated, addictive, wonderful thing.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

David Levithan is a children's book editor in New York City. He lives in Hoboken, New Jersey.

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STARBUCKS BOY

It was my aunt who pimped me out.

We had this arrangement: I would get to live with her for a few weeks over the summer and take a pre-college course at Columbia before my senior year. In return, I wouldn't have to do a thing besides stay out of the way. It sounded like a good plan to me, except that when I got to Columbia on the first day of summer classes, I found that my course had been dropped. Apparently, there'd been a notice that nobody in my family had bothered to notice.

I thought Aunt Celia would be mad. Or at least concerned. But instead she said, "Well, this could actually solve Elise's problem."

Elise was a friend of Aunt Celia's who lived in the same apartment building. She had a six-year-old daughter. "I'm sure you're wonderful with children," Aunt Celia told me.

This was an especially strange statement coming from Aunt Celia, who (as far as I could tell) considered the continued existence of children to be something akin to a plague. We have a picture we love to look at in my immediate family, taken right after my brother, Jonathan, was born. It's Aunt Celia's turn to hold him, and from the look on her face and the positioning of her body, you'd think that someone had asked her to cradle a ten-pound turd. Nothing personal against Jonathan--I'm sure she was the same with me. As Jonathan and I grew up, Aunt Celia always gave us presents to "save for later." For my seventh birthday I received a pair of Tiffany candlesticks. For my eighth, it was a matching finger bowl. I freaked out, thinking a finger bowl was meant to hold fingers. (Aunt Celia left the room so my parents could explain.) When I turned thirteen, Aunt Celia actually seemed relieved. She finally stopped maintaining any pretense of treating me like a child, and started treating me like a lesser form of adult instead.

"Aren't you?" she now prompted. "Wonderful? With children?"

I didn't know where we were going with this, but I was sure that If I had no reason to stay in New York, Aunt Celia would ship me back to suburbia faster than she could dial out for dinner. Even if I found a way to avoid being underfoot, she would be unnerved by the concept of me being underfoot.

"I'm wonderful with children," I assured her. Various instances of me "babysitting" Jonathan flashed through my head--we hadn't been allowed to have pets, so I'd often encouraged him to act like one. I thought it best not to mention the particulars of my sitting experience, which, at its most extreme, stopped just short of accidental lobotomy.

"Perfect," she said. Then she picked up her cell phone off the front table, speed-dialed, and told the person on the other end, "Elise, it's Celia. I have a solution for the whole Astrid affair. My nephew . . . yes, Gabriel. The one I was telling you about . . . escaping my sister, yes. Well, it seems that his course has been canceled. And I happen to know he's wonderful with children. A complete charmer . . . Yes, he's entirely free. . . . I'm sure those hours would be fine. . . . He's delighted. . . . You'll see him then. . . . Yes, it's quite a loaded potato Absolutely my pleasure!"

She hung up and looked at me like I'd just been checked off a list.

"It's all set," she said. "Although you'll have to dress nicer than that."

"What's all set?" I asked. If I couldn't do it in a T-shirt, I was worried.

"Why, your job. For the next three weeks."

"Which is . . . ?" I coaxed.

She sighed. "To take care of Elise's daughter, Arabella. You'll love her. She's wonderful."

No follow-up questions were possible. With an air kiss and a trail of perfume, Aunt Celia was off.

I started the next morning at eight. My class was supposed to have started at ten, and I'd looked forward to the extra hours of sleep. Instead, Aunt Celia came into my room at seven-fifteen, turned on the lights, released a low-octaved "Be ready by eight," and left before I could see her without the compensations of makeup.

Even after I cured my early-morning dayblindness with two cups of coffee and a shower prolonged by ten minutes of tangential thinking, I still wasn't fully awake when I rang the doorbell of apartment 8C. I looked presentable enough in my button-down shirt and khakis, but my mind felt buttoned-down and khaki as well. I was already starting to resent my new job.

Aunt Celia's friend Elise was three-quarters out the door when she opened it for me.

"You must be Gabriel," she said. "I've heard so much about you. Come in."

Elise was one of those women who exercised so often that she was starting to look like a piece of exercise equipment herself. She walked around the apartment as if she were still on a treadmill, telling me about emergency numbers and people to call and when to expect her back.

"I really appreciate you doing this," she said, putting on her jacket and leading me down a hallway.

"Arabella's back here."

Arabella's door was decorated with a framed copy of the unicorn tapestry from The Cloisters. Elise knocked three quick raps into the door, then opened it for me. I was astounded, but not particularly surprised, by the room that was revealed to me. It was everything you might expect from a fairly rich New York City girl named Arabella. It was designed like a Vogue version of Disney, with a four-poster bed and no-poster walls. Pink was the dominant color, with blue and green playing the major supporting roles. My attention was caught by a number of wide-eyed dolls relegated to size-order rows on a magisterial display shelf, as if they were about to take a class picture and had dressed for the occasion. This was the room I had never dreamed about as a little boy, and still feared now.

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