



Making Nice

Matt Sumell

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In Matt Sumell's blazing first book, our hero Alby flails wildly against the world around him—he punches his sister (she deserved it), "unprotectos" broads (they deserved it and liked it), gets drunk and picks fights (all deserved), defends defenseless creatures both large and small, and spews insults at children, slow drivers, old ladies, and every single surviving member of his family. In each of these stories Alby distills the anguish, the terror, the humor, and the strange grace—or lack of—he experiences in the aftermath of his mother's death. Swirling at the center of Alby's rage is a grief so big, so profound, it might swallow him whole. As he drinks, screws, and jokes his way through his pain and heartache, Alby's anger, his kindness, and his capacity for good bubble up when he (and we) least expect it. Sumell delivers "a naked rendering of a heart sorting through its broken pieces to survive.*"

Making Nice is a powerful, full-steam-ahead ride that will keep you laughing even as you try to catch your breath; a new classic about love, loss, and the fine line between grappling through grief and fighting for (and with) the only family you've got.

*Mark Richard

Making Nice Details

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From Reader Review Making Nice for online ebook

Blake Kimzey says

This is the best book I've read in a long time. It has everything you want when you sit down to read a great novel, and a heartbreakingly real narrator named Alby that you grow to love over the course of the book. Alby is fully broken after the death of his mother and this is his account of why he is the way he is. Almost every page has a line or lines that will make you laugh out loud. This is the funniest book I've ever read, and it's also achingly sad in parts, sections that will make you wanna cry because Alby's hurt is so real and so fully lived out on the page. Sumell dares to be sentimental, and it is this realness that makes the book so memorable. I believe Alby will go down as one the great literary narrators of our time, and when this book comes out I hope you have a copy in hand. You're gonna love it.

Betsy Robinson says

[6/7/18 Update: A GR friend just rated this book, and seeing her rating reminded me, almost three years after I read this phenomenal book, how much I loved it. And since I have many more active friends now, I thought I'd resurrect my review. I envy anyone who gets to read this book for the first time.]

Raw, wild and free-wheeling, blasphemous, pained, and hilarious, *Making Nice* is a novel made from a collection of stories that work like the shards of a shattered window falling in such a way that you can still see the pane (pun intended). Angry-young-man narrator Alby is a pushover for a stranded baby cardinal he names Gary, his dog Sparkles, a possibly suicidal grasshopper, and a slug named Cherokee Bob, but he can't control his hair-trigger temper or his mouth or, the bigger problem, life—the fact that stuff happens, people suffer, and no matter how hard you love, everyone and everything dies. In this rollicking, nasty story of his travails, he explains himself:

Somewhere along the way I'd become incapable of relaxing, of allowing my body to be still, of rest. It isn't that I have more energy than I know what to do with, because I don't. It's that my body is uncomfortable. It's not pain, necessarily, but an antsy annoyance of the muscles and—when still—I become excruciatingly aware of just how uncomfortable I am. Then I have to move. I get up and pace around, shake my hand like I just touched something too hot, fidget, tap a table or countertop. I take long walks.

In a car, though, I'm stuck, and the entire drive up from Wilmington had been a nonstop series of seat adjustments and shoulder rolls, opening and closing windows, switching CDs and tinkering with the volume knob, rubbing my eyeballs and punching myself in the legs, as if hurting the leg hurts the ache that's in it. I smoked a lot of cigarettes, cracked my knuckles, my ankles, my back and my neck, cracked everything that was crackable and bobbed my head in order to make a smashed bug on the windshield appear to fly just above the treetops bordering the interstate, until I banged my chin on the steering wheel while attempting to clear a particularly tall pine outside of Richmond. When that got old, I looked for things to look at: the rearview, the rearview, trees, a dead dog next to a blue hospital sign and GOD BLESS OUR SOLDIERS BEEFY BURRITO \$1.39, the rearview—anything but the road itself. I've been in over a dozen accidents, all of which were my fault. I hit a bridge once. I drove through a closed

garage door. It's stopping I have a problem with.

Alby is a Holden Caulfield with no filters, on uppers, living in our crazy twenty-first century with way more noise, dysfunction, and heartbreak than Salinger ever imagined. This is scary-good funny writing that is sure to thrill some readers (*moi*) and enrage anybody who does not enjoy wallowing in and laughing at the darkness within us.

Douglas Lord says

Sumell's debut novel is an asskicker. Alby, 30, is a spazz. Whether he's your kid brother, older brother, stepbrother, or maybe your own damn self, Alby is family and the only thing you can predict about him is his unpredictability. He's annoying, loses most of the fistfights he starts, and he's not all that fun to be around: exactly why he is so real, so riveting. Readers meet him soon after his mother has died from cancer and he is completely undone by grief. Though filled with brio, Alby doesn't know what to do with himself and has the tendency to lash out, like when he punches his sister "right in the tits" (it "skimmed over the right tit and landed solidly on the left"). Amid other powerful vignettes, Alby adopts an abandoned baby chick which is "almost transparent. He looked like a dog's heart with a bird's head stuck on, a blob with a beak..." Alby names him Gary and envisions him growing into "a goddamn falcon that flies around the neighborhood all day eating raccoons and dogs and toddlers before he flies back to my forearm and takes shits." Over innumerable Hot Pockets in the kitchen, Alby explains to his concerned, amputee father that "I got a thing in my heart for helpless things that need me, OK?" If Alby doesn't make too much nice with people, it's only his tempestuous honesty and genuineness that prevents it. Seemingly unlikable, Alby is actually honest, if energetically troubled, with a voice reminiscent of Scott McClanahan's in *Crapalachia*. VERDICT This excellent, readable, and engaging story cycle begins what I hope will be many from Sumell, whose comic timing and dead-on black humor are welcome any time in my house. Does a man-child raising a female cardinal he names Gary as a falcon whom he envisions as "hunting mammals and butt-fucking seagulls" make you laugh? If not, skip it but most dudes will say, "you had me at 'Gary.'"

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Lorilin says

I'm a little surprised, honestly, that there are so many low-star reviews for this book, because I thought it was one of the best books I've read in months. The main character--Alby, Albert, Al (Matt?)--is crass and irreverent, just a colossal a-hole, to be sure. But the vulnerability! Oh, man, I felt like I was flailing right along with the guy. I felt his pain and understood his desperation as he tried to grapple with the death of his mother (and the Disappointment that is his father). Would I ever want to be friends with him? Absolutely not. And God forbid he try to hit on me in a bar. But as an outsider, as an observer with no ties to or responsibility over this character, I could allow myself to empathize with him. And I most definitely did.

Sumell's writing style certainly helped those feelings along. He has a unique approach. He's all over the place, kind of random stream-of-consciousness. It could be confusing at times, but I enjoyed it. It made me FEEL something. It made me connect with the characters, almost like I could tap into their emotional states in a way that traditional dialogue or linear storytelling could never accomplish. Like this, for example:

So I have to wonder then if [loss] could be better explained with numbers, if there's some equation, some formula that could calculate the force by which my mother's death impacted me. So shattered was my spoiled-white-kid understanding of the world by it that I'm convinced momentum and mass somehow come into play. Maybe an algorithm could better explain how her suffering and dying divided time into before and after, could calculate how precious my dog became to me as a result, could communicate how his loss seemed like a loss compounded, interest earned on a previous injury. Maybe math could help me understand why--after suffering for so long--I don't get better at suffering. But I don't. Every time, I don't.

There is a rawness to both the characters and the method of storytelling in this book. It all felt fresh and interesting. Alby may have irritated me, but I still liked him. I wanted to know more about him, and, eventually, I wanted him to succeed.

One thing I will mention, there is a whole lot of profanity and crassness (and a whole lot of profane, crass sex talk) in this book. You're going to want to prepare yourself for that. For me, it was never offensive, but I'm not really offended easily. It also helped that I thought Alby was ridiculously funny; I just couldn't take even his most disgusting remarks seriously. But I'll still put the warning out there.

Overall, this was such a good read. I am so happy I picked up the book, and I would definitely recommend giving it a go--despite all the meh reviews.

See more of my reviews at www.BugBugBooks.com!

Kiki says

I'm not sure why I went ahead and decided to read this book. Something about the description must have captured me, but the opening chapter turned me off. I put it down for a few days, but then I kept reading. And I laughed. I laughed out loud! And I felt compassion and even an affection for the crazy narrator, Alby, as well as for his family. I was also inspired to keep reading since I grew up on Long Island, which is the main setting for this story. So the book had a couple of things going for it, including the fact that I found myself laughing out loud quite often.

Alby is an angry young man--think Holden Caulfield meets a straight David Sedaris--he is disillusioned, and from a highly dysfunctional but loving family, grieving over the loss of his mother and trying to deal with the inability of his dad to cope with the loss. Their family is dysfunctional to start with, as so many families are. Alby drinks, fights, and is almost completely unable to control his impulses to do and say the whatever comes into his head. He is clearly a man of action. But he is also a very sensitive person. When you get to know Alby, you might even like him. Many people do. And he is also someone who has a natural love for the helpless and the hurt.

Don't expect an amazingly written and beautiful novel, but this might be something you could take a chance on. The writing reflects the gritty nature of a family that has experienced great loss and pain, reflected in one family member. Alby is funny, angry, horrible, and lovable all at the same time. You might even need a tissue. The honest story makes up for the lack of polish in the writing, and was actually suitable, since Alby is anything but polished. I'd give Mr Sumell a chance again.

LANGUAGE ALERT!!!

If you are easily offended by bad language, or base talk about sexual acts, this is NOT the book for you. Do

not read this. If you can accept that some characters (and people) use this language as a regular part of their vocabulary, and that it is part of what makes this book work, than you may do okay. I had a hard time when I first started reading the book because of this language, but then you see who he is, and how it is necessary to understand the narrator.

Keith Rosson says

Interconnected stories in the loose shape of a novel. While the main character is an unabashed asshole - to the point where some of the sexual situations here made me uncomfortable - Sumell writes like a goddamned acrobat, jumping from laugh-out-loud humor to pathos and back in the space of a paragraph. Seriously incredible, and one of the funniest books I've read in years. I could go on and on, but instead I'll say: there's few books that I'd consider giving as a gift to a vast number of people, and as both grim and juvenile as *Making Nice* might be, it's definitely at the top of the list. Recommended.

Susan says

You know that kind of cute, sometimes charming total loser that you slept with that one time when you were bored and drunk? This is a series of interconnected short stories about him. Sumell has some nice verbal gymnastics, but I couldn't find a way to like this. (Note: I received an advance review copy.)

Claire Jefferies says

It's taken me a few weeks to process this book - and still, I'm not quite sure whether to give this one star or four. I'm settling on two, because Sumell is certainly a talented writer, some of it made me laugh out loud, and it touches on a topic I'm deeply interested in (and know too much about, unfortunately): the death of a parent. Sumell does a particularly good job of illustrating family dynamics before and after the loss of his mother (not a spoiler; you learn this in the first few pages) - how some people change and some stay the same, some become better people because of their grief, others become worse. I lost my father at 23, and something very few people warned me about was how different my entire family would become after his death. It's as if we no longer had a center, and Sumell does a really good job of demonstrating how the loss of his mother impacted him individually and collectively as a family.

The main character in *Making Nice* is Alby, and frankly, he's the reason I would give this one star. I hated this character for so many reasons. He's disgusting and crass and crude and gross and doesn't do anything that's the least bit charming or endearing throughout this entire book.

But let me tell you about a scene with Alby that made me feel ALL THE RAGE. I almost stopped reading the book because of it (and probably would have had I not felt an obligation to continue and review because I received an ARC from Goodreads). Our Alby is making out with a girl at a bar - maybe it was a friend of a girlfriend's friend, someone he knew vaguely but definitely not his girlfriend - and takes her home. They continue making out, etc. This gal (which truly, I have no idea how someone like Alby ever convinced anyone to make out with him) continues to tell him that she doesn't want to have sex. Alby keeps trying to "slip it in" (without protection, of course) and she continues to tell him that she doesn't want to have sex and he keeps trying to "slip it in" anyway until she finally is too drunk or tired of protesting or whatever and then

Alby is victorious because she gives in and they have unprotected sex and the way he writes about his success makes me want to vomit. Oh good grief I'm feeling so rageful again writing about this. You know what? I don't even know how to rate this. It makes me so angry that a writer would create a character who could write so flippantly about non-consensual sex and make it seem as though NOTHING was wrong with it. There are going to be guys, old and young, who read this and think "oh yeah, I've done that before, heh" and girls who read this and think "I want to scream and punch someone in the jaw because I've had guys do that before and this male writer is writing about this with no care in the world, like it's totally not assault to ignore a girl who says no because I'll just slip it in and then she agrees right?"

Maybe this is more of an issue for me than I realized. Yeah, I can't give this one three stars. Because this isn't the only time Alby completely disparages women, it happens throughout the entire book. It reminded me a little of Charles Bukowski's work, which also gives me the rage due to his treatment of female characters.

I have a feeling guys are going to like this one, but I wonder how females will react. I was going to write this really introspective response linking to this article by Jim Shepard about redemption of characters in Flannery O'Connor's work but after processing the scene above, I just can't give it that level of respect just now.

So, in conclusion: Sumell is talented, but read this one at your own risk.

Theresa says

The first problem I had with "Making Nice" by Matt Summell is the lack of character development. I found it unbearable and impossible to root for or like the protagonist, Alby. Alby is basically a man-child. He takes no responsibility for his crude and unflattering behavior. He's a belligerent and immature alcoholic with severe anger issues, and he's incredibly disrespectful to the women he has casual encounters with. Borderline rapist, anyone??? The way he treats himself and others is vile and pathetic. Alby is a deeply-flawed character who never learns from his lessons. He bitches and moans for the majority of the book. The only time he seems to have a heart is when he takes care of a baby bird which he names Gary. Alby is heart-broken after the death of his mother (which is understandable). He wanders aimlessly around his neighborhood "searching" for meaning, but he's too lazy to make any real changes in his life. The second problem I had was Summell's writing style. The writing is so choppy and confusing. The way he writes about Alby is so randomly boring and distasteful. Such a shame because the first chapter of this book was funny and brilliant. After that, the story never gets off the ground. There's basically no plot. The rest of the chapters were draggy and pointless. The ending didn't feel like an ending at all. Don't waste your time or money. This book is a stinker.

Erik Eckel says

I will not apologize for enjoying Matt Sumell's Making Nice. The book's interrelated stories essentially constitute a novel, albeit a work that's rude, crude and assuredly offensive to many. Too bad for those who interpret the book with such shortsightedness. I found Making Nice a genuine representation packed full of real-world vernacular, experiences, issues and emotions. Sumell deserves credit for authoring such an honest book that effectively and poignantly--movingly, even--explores the pain of loss, aging and unrealized

dreams.

Alena says

I know better than to choose a book based on cover design or cover blurbs, but this one suckered me in on both counts. Then I spent 4 days trying to decide if I loved it or hated it.

I've read lots of loser men novels (I'm talking to you Jonathan Tropper), but the losers are usually lovable, or at least trying to be lovable. Matt Sumell takes his loser Alby to a whole new level of crude, abrasive violence and several times I just wanted to stop reading. But then, there were moments of such great writing, I'd be drawn back in.

I can't exactly recommend this book, but I would be interested in reading more of this author's work.

Tuck says

interesting, funny, and grotesque story of what happens when dooshbags go through the grieving process. it aint pretty, but it is pretty insightful, leer-inducing, and talented.

Yossi says

3.5

Estoy cansado de lo poíticamente correcto, de las convenciones, de todo aquel que juzga qué tenemos que sentir y cómo. No hay concesiones para el protagonista de la novela, Alby: es un gilipollas integral, la última persona que querríamos tener alrededor en los momentos en los que nos arrastramos por el suelo porque un comentario insensible de su parte haría que deseáramos más que nada que se abriera una grieta y nos succionara, la última persona que querríamos tener alrededor cuando hemos bebido un par de copas de más y estamos bailando sobre la barra, saltando hasta querer intentar tocar los focos con la punta de los dedos, Alby se encargaría de meterse en una pelea o de aguar la fiesta al nivel del combinado que hemos dejado en la barra por no poder tolerar una gota más.

Pero aquí hay un juego de espejos. Alby ha sufrido una pérdida, un golpe duro que no ha sabido encajar y si bien Sumell no lo justifica, Alby ha sido siempre un auténtico imbécil, es capaz de mostrarnos toda su vulnerabilidad y su incapacidad de lidiar con ella.

No llego a entender a todos los que han valorado el libro con tal falta de estrellas. Sí, tiene fallos: la irreverencia a veces da una vuelta de tuerca más, el sentido del humor puede resultar algo hiriente pero la historia no está ahí: es necesario sacudir las palabras de las páginas con la mano y quedarse con el vacío, con el espacio en blanco que Alby no sabe llenar.

Hoolie says

Go get this book. By the time you're at page 189 and you read this gem:

Still, his life (Dad) now seemed so depressing I was starting to believe he actually did want to die, because I probably would, and I followed him into the kitchen and asked if he was still taking his antidepressants. He wasn't, he said, bc they made him tired.

Narrator/son: "You know dead is like being super tired forever, right?"

Dark? Yes. But genuine, honest, offensive and funny? Also yes. This is only one of a double dozen times I have laughed or smirked unconsciously from reading this book on the subway. People must think I'm 12.

Matt says

To paraphrase two other reviews "it's not for everyone" and "I don't feel like I have to apologize for it" but if this book is for you it will sweep you in quickly and won't let go until you finish the book. Manic, funny and crude my guess is you will either love it or hate it.
