BOOK REVIEW *NOTES FROM THE BLENDER* By Trish Cook

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BOOK REVIEW
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my dad! In a freaking Smiths shirt. Yep, that’s Dad all right. He was all trying to talk to me, and I was like, “I’m not talking to you with that beer in your hand, loser.” Dad with the underage drinking! And the Smiths shirt! What a tool! So he threw the beer at Paul Westerberg, and they nearly stopped the show he was so pissed, and I guess he thought he was being funny, but it was just such a loser move, like I’m going to be impressed that he threw a beer at the stage. Loser, loser, loser.

I felt I had to stick up for Dad here. That was a pretty badass move, considering it could have gotten him arrested and/or beaten senseless, and he did it to impress a girl. That’s gotta count for something!

Apparently not, or at least not at first. A couple of months go by until Dad’s name comes up again.

Thomas came up to me out of nowhere, like I know him only from English class and when he stopped the ‘Mats from playing “Gary’s Got a Boner” in the middle, which actually wasn’t that bad of a move, and he was like, “Listen, I don’t know if you have prom plans, but I’ve got Elvis Costello tickets for prom night, and I’d much rather see Elvis Costello with you than go to some lameass dance.”

I told him I would think about it, which I am now doing. I don’t like Elvis Costello, but I guess I like him more than prom—stupid ritual with stupid . . . ah, but I was kind of looking forward to being all giddy. I guess that would blow my image, but there you go. I kind of wanted to get all dressed up. I snagged that awesome vintage gown at the thrift store. Plus, I don’t really get why Thomas asked me. I mean, aren’t there, like, some New Wave chicks he could ask or something? Elvis Costello, or awesome vintage dress and hearing horrible music until I can’t stand it anymore and then ditching the stupid after parties because everyone will be drinking, and if I want that shit, I’d just as soon come home where at least I can lock myself in my room.

I guess I knew how this came out, because here I am, and named after Elvis Costello, too, but I kept reading anyway. And found, to my horror, my badass mom totally wussified by the power of love. Here’s all she had to say the day after the concert.

So yeah, we went to Elvis Costello in our prom clothes, which was Thomas’s idea, and he is really sweet, and I really like him, and I guess I like Elvis Costello now, and yeah even a guy who walks around wearing Smiths shirts who turns out to be an amazing kisser.

Which is where I bailed, because if she got into any more detail about their late-night activities together, I may have had to vomit copiously.

I closed the journal, but I didn’t put it in the box.

I headed out to the garage. Dad was in a boxing-and-sealing frenzy. “Dad,” I called out. “Attic’s done.”

He raised his head. “Thanks, Dec. You rock.”

“No, Dad, you rock. You threw beer on Paul Westerberg!”

He stopped, looked at me, and took in the Minor Threat pin and the journal. “Is that what she said? It was actually Bob Stinson, and he was so shitfaced he didn’t even notice. Do you know I’ve never even read that?”

“Do you want to?”

“Nah. If she’d wanted me to read it, she would have shown me when she was alive. It’s between you and her now.”

Something occurred to me. “Did you want me to find this?”

“Duh, Dec. There are like five boxes in the attic. I could have done that myself. Yeah, I wanted you to find it. I wanted you to know that just because we’re leaving this house doesn’t mean we’re leaving her. We can’t leave her. She’s in our hearts, you know? So we can’t leave her.”

I was pissed. Pissed about his crafty little scheme, and also because he was going all Hallmark-y on me again and trying to get me to cry. So I changed the subject.

“So Dad, where’d you get the stones to pursue a badass like Mom, anyway?”


Well. The next day I was moving in with Neilly Foster, also kind of a badass in her own gorgeous-popular-girl way. And yeah, it would be weird, and awkward, and all that stuff, but I didn’t care. She wasn’t my real sister, and she wouldn’t even be my step-sister until they got married. She’d just be some incredibly hot girl who thinks I’m sweet and who laughs at my jokes and who happens to live down the hall. Hell, if that scenario was taboo, nobody would ever get laid at college.

Yep. If Dad could go after what he wanted, then dammit, so could I.
Too bad she goes for jocks and muscleheads, which means I have exactly the same shot with her as with anybody I download on Dad’s computer. There are decent girls who go for thestoners, too—bad, dangerous-looking girls, some of whom look like they might just find it interesting to introduce an innocent like myself to the mysteries of the flesh.

But here’s the thing. The dildo who killed my mom was driving under the influence of alcohol, marijuana, and a couple of prescription medications. I guess it was a bell of a party.

So it’s hard for me to think of the normal high school drinking and drugging as harmless party activities. I have a pretty hard time keeping my mouth shut about what weak-minded idiots people who get wasted are.

I don’t get invited to a lot of parties.

But I do have some friends, though I guess they’re really more school friends than home friends—the kind of people you sit next to in study hall but never call on the weekends. And I have my weekends at Sarah and Lisa’s house, and I’ve got my metal (Did you know the coolest black metal comes from Norway? True fact!) and my games, and I choose to believe what my dad tells me—that once I get to college, girls will go crazy for a smart guy they can have a conversation with. It’s hard to think about suffering through another two years of high school to get to that, but I’m comfortable enough, I guess.

Or I was, until I walk in the door—a year after our last Serious Talk, during which time I had vainly hoped that we were through with Serious Talks forever—and I see Dad wearing that face.

“What?” I say as soon as I see him.

“Declan, we need to talk.”

Oh shit. The full name. It’s never good when you get off the nickname basis. I just look at him. “Well?” I say.

“Declan, I don’t know how to tell you this. It’s kind of a . . . . I mean, I certainly never expected . . . . Well, as we know all too painfully, life hands you surprises. But you know what I’ve found out? Not all the surprises life has in store are bad ones. Sometimes you think you have things figured out, and then, zap! Things change.” He looks at me like he’s just said something.

“Dad, what the hell are you talking about?”

“Declan, I’m getting married.”

Secret Life marathon, ice-cream pity party, and TLC from Mommy Dearest clearly weren’t meant to be.

“Neily, we need to talk.”

“My mom—the one who had always prided herself on being so open with me, the one I told almost everything to and thought told everything to me—had just been revealed as a complete and utter fraud. I had no clue who the guy was, leading me to believe I didn’t know who my mother was anymore, either.

“You’re a grown woman. You don’t have to ask my permission to get laid,” I shot back at her.

My mom got that look on her face—the one where her top lip quivers right before the waterworks start. “No. But I would like your permission to get married,” she said softly.

It was the final straw. After my dad announced he wanted a divorce in order to be with “Uncle” Roger—his new law partner who soon became his new life partner—my mom told me she’d sworn off men forever. I believe all the good ones are gay were her exact words. And now . . . . this. Total shocker, and I don’t mean that in a good way.

“Permission not granted!” I yelled, and slammed right back out the front door.

I quickly dialed my dad’s cell, but it went directly to voice mail. I didn’t even bother to leave a message, just started walking again. Eventually, I looked up and realized I had no clue what part of town I was in and no one to call to come get me anyway.

The only thing that saved me from going completely insane was the cute little church at the end of the block. It was white clapboard with an old-fashioned steeple, and it had a sign out front that read ALL ARE WELCOME, ALWAYS. I figured that must include me.

So I walked inside, looked around to see if anyone was there—it was completely empty—and plunked myself down on a worn wooden pew. And then I just sat there, staring from a stained-glass window of Jesus to the rainbow flags lining the walls to the statue of Buddha on the altar and back again, wondering what crazy kind of religion believed in all those things.

I also wondered what the hell to do next. I’d given up on church once I realized my dad wouldn’t be welcome anymore in the one we used to go to. And I’d also pretty much given up on any God that would condemn a person for falling in love with someone just because they were the “wrong” gender. So I couldn’t exactly sit there and pray, because if there was a God, he was probably just as pissed at me as I was at Him.

So instead, I did the only thing I could think of—I put my head in my hands and cried like a baby. All alone, with no need to pretend I didn’t have feelings like I do all the time at school, my body was flooded with total relief.

Until I realized I wasn’t alone at all.

“I think I know exactly how you feel right now.”

For a second, I thought maybe God, Jesus, or their mutual
At least Dad had never blamed me for that. Or, anyway, I never thought he did.

“So, listen, Dec,” he’d said at the conclusion of last year’s Serious Talk, “I’ve talked to your aunt Sarah, and we’ve agreed that you’re going to spend Saturday nights over there and then go to church with her on Sunday mornings.”

“Church? Church? You’re kidding, right?” I had heard my dad talking to his sister Sarah after mom died and saying that any God who’d take my mom away wasn’t worth getting out of bed for on Sunday.

“No, Dec, I’m not. I want . . . I feel like I’m not doing a great job—I mean, I bought you the games I’m complaining about, right? I want you to have some female influence in your life, and yeah, I do want you to go to church, even if you hate it, so it’s not all demons and killing.”

I had been so angry I was actually speechless, which rarely happens. “And you know, I mean, Dec, it’s important for you to know that porn isn’t real. I mean, they’re really having sex, but that’s not what real sex is like. Real sex is—”

“Dad, I swear to God I will go to Aunt Sarah’s house and spend the night and go be the minister’s helper if you will promise to never, ever tell me what real sex is like.” I mean, who wants to hear that from their dad? Well, son, when your mother and I used to hit it . . . No. Not what I want to hear at all. Ever.

Dad had paused, looking like he was thinking about getting mad, and then he’d smiled. “Deal.”

So that’s how I came to spend weekends with my aunt Sarah, the minister at First Church, and her partner, Lisa. And how I got a job as the First Church sexton. That sounds a lot more interesting than it actually is. The sexton is actually the church janitor. So I go and sweep up the parish hall, dispose of the mouse corpses that collect in the kitchen, set some new traps, maybe rake some leaves, that kind of stuff. And the whole time, I try to figure out how I can ever say, ‘Yeah, they call me the sexton, ‘cause I’m bringing a ton of sex.” Which doesn’t even really make sense, but it amuses me when I’m doing the parts of the job that are less interesting than rodent disposal.

And I guess Dad’s evil plan of a year ago kind of worked. After spending around fifty weekends at their house and three afternoons a week doing sexton stuff at the church, I now think of Sarah and Lisa a lot like real parents. I love them and they bug the shit out of me. I still listen to death metal, I still play M-rated games where I deal death and destruction, and I still look at porn.

I am now a high school sophomore, but no closer to getting to see a real girl naked, so I have to make do with digitized fantasy women, or scenarios my own fevered imagination cooks up about Neelly Foster. It sounds like a cheesy song or something, but this girl is so hot I think maybe it should be illegal. I only ever see her at lunch and in the halls—she’s a junior, after all—which is good, because if I had any classes with her, I would probably fail. I once saw her eating a Popsicle in the caf and had to go home for the rest of the day.

“Not stare at her legs when she was talking to you. That would have been a good start.”

“Dad, I mean, I know you’re engaged and everything, but have you looked at this woman?”

“Dec, there are conversational places where I just can’t go with you. Your lustful feelings for a woman at least twice your age is definitely one of those places.”

“But she is hot. You know it.”

“Fine, she’s an attractive woman. I’ll make sure I find you a male therapist for your next session.”

“What do you mean, for my next session? I thought this was a one-time thing!”

“Well, I just realized that having me there might actually be preventing you from saying whatever is on your mind, so it might be more helpful for you to go on your own for a while so you can get this stuff out without worrying what I might think about it.”

“Dad, except for the part about Dr. Rappaport being an incredible hottie, that’s the most sensible thing you’ve said in weeks.”

“I never said Dr. Ra—”

“It was implied. Clearly implied.”

Dad fought back a smile.

I was feeling pretty proud of myself until Dad told me the next day that Dr. Gordon had had a cancellation and we’d be heading straight over for my one-on-one therapy session. “Dad, I’d be totally happy to have a one-on-one with Dr. Rappaport. Actually, a two-on-one would be fine, too, because her receptionist—”

“Do you have any idea how horribly uncomfortable it makes me when you say stuff like that?”

“Duh. Why do you think I’m saying it?” It’s true. Except for getting busted for BitTorrent porn, I had been concealing the fact that I am, as Lisa might say, “a sexual being” from Dad ever since I started feeling like a sexual being, and now I was flaunting it all over the place, mostly because I’d discovered it gave me power over him.

He stared at me for a minute.

“What?”

“You just—I dunno. Your mom had that same stubborn, mischievous streak. It makes it really hard for me to stay mad at you about it.”

Touche—I make Dad uncomfortable by talking about my desires; he makes me uncomfortable by talking about Mom. I don’t know if he’s doing this intentionally or not. In either case, I don’t respond, but I really like hearing that there’s part of Mom surviving in me, so I smile, which, of course, means Dad wins.

And then he won again, because I wound up crying in Dr. Gordon’s office. I swear I don’t know how the guy did it. It might have had something to do with him being this really unattractive white-haired old man, so I couldn’t be distracted by thinking about him naked. In fact, the very thought of that is completely
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I could not believe the guy’s gall. Was I supposed to be happy he’d come to pick me up for our date to my dad’s wedding pie-drunk in a Juno costume?

“Sam, why don’t I drive you home so you can take a quick shower? I’ll pick you up a double shot at Starbucks while you’re getting ready, and we can forget this whole scene ever happened.”

Sam shook his head as if to clear it. It seemed to work, at least a little bit, because when he opened his mouth again, the shivering was under control.

“Yeah, see, here’s the thing, Neilly,” he said, lifting his index finger to the sky, like God himself was about to make the pronouncement. “My dad is really not cool with me going tonight. In fact, he forbids it. I tried to talk some sense into him, but he said it’s a crime against nature, and that I can kiss the season good-bye if I do.”

“It’s a crime against nature to escort me to my dad’s wedding!” I demanded. “And he won’t let you play any more football this year if you do! That’s the stupidest thing I ever heard!”

Sam put his hands on my shoulders. The fact that he leaned too much of his weight on me reminded me once again of his ultra-inhibited state. “Neils, I can’t not play.”

I was losing my patience. “I really don’t think your dad would go through with it, Sam. Be realistic.”

Sam shrugged. “You know I’d do just about anything for you, Neilly. . . .”

“Sweetie,” Carmen said, patting Dad’s arm, “just pull over for the end of the story.”

“Did you just make a joke about your mom’s death?” Dad asked.

“Yeah, I guess so,” I said.

“Wow. So now you’re admitting it happened, if only in a sort of twisted way. Good deal.” Damn it. Score another one for the old man.

“So, Stig,” Neilly said. “What form did you sign?”

“So glad you asked, my sister. The form that one signs when one goes to get a tattoo.”

“A what?” Dad and Neilly both screamed again.

“My new friend Anastasi—aka veganchick!—who, by the way, I’m meeting for coffee before the SOI show at the VFW next week—is, as you recall from the SuicideGirls comparison you made, Dad, rather heavily inked, in addition to bespectacled and delicious, so I inquired of her where one might go for such a thing. She sent me to a very nice place—all vegan, by the way. Did you know some tattoo inks have animal products in them? How gross is that?”

“Let’s see it,” Neilly said. “That’s why you’ve been babying your arm all week, right? Let’s see it!”

I looked forward at Dad. He kept looking back at me and sideways at Carmen. “You knew about this?” he asked Carmen. “He’s sixteen! Dec, when you get to be my age—”

“I’m still gonna be stoked as hell to have this on my arm,” I said, removing the tuxedo jacket and rolling up my sleeve.

“Oh my God,” Dad and Neilly both said, but I’m not sure if that one counted as a jinx, since Neilly’s was, like, “Oh my God, how cool is that,” and Dad’s was more in the “Oh my God, my kid has a big ass tattoo on his arm vein.”

I looked down at my tattoo. No skulls, no demons, nothing anybody would remotely expect from me. Instead, a single lily, and above it, PATIENCE. Now I’ll always be connected to Mom because her name is on my arm. And yeah, if it reminds me to take a deep breath before I get mad, well, I guess that’s okay, too.

“You are the coolest person I know,” Neilly said.

“You act like you don’t know your own mom,” I said.

“Apparently, I don’t!” Neilly said, laughing. “Knocked up, hanging out at tattoo parlors . . . Mom, do you want me to drop you guys at the mall so you can hang out by the fountain and go shopping at Hot Topic?”

“No tonight, sweetie. I have to watch your father marry a dude, remember?”

“Right.”

“Dad?” I said. Dad still had this stunned look on his face. At least, I think it was stunned. I realized it might be something else when I saw the tears start leaking out of his eyes.

“It’s really beautiful,” he choked out in this semi-crying voice.

“Awww, sweetie, I’m sorry,” Carmen said, stroking Dad’s arm.
understand it at all because it has to do with the way the female brain works. But in a nutshell, if a guy sees a girl with another guy, he gets annoyed because she’s off-limits. If a girl sees a guy with another girl, he automatically goes into the potential boyfriend file.

I know. I don’t get it, either.

But it doesn’t matter because once Anastasia and I broke up (Okay, after she dumped me. There may have been tears. There may have been some rather embarrassing and unmanly pleasing . . .), I had like three girls suddenly sending me messages on the old social networks. Even Chantelle started talking to me again. Too bad for her—she had her chance.

So I’ve got three prospects right now, or four, I guess, if you count Chantelle, which I don’t, probably, and I don’t feel particularly desperate to have a girlfriend right now, which probably will attract even more girls.

I will now stop talking about girls because it’s about to lead me bragging about some of the various activities Anastasia and I engaged in, particularly on occasion four, and apparently people get really annoyed and/or disgusted when you brag about such things.

And, anyway, there was another big event that took place after Neilly’s dad’s wedding.

I got this text from Dad during fifth period: Carmen’s in labor. Come to the hospital after school.

This was followed almost immediately by one from Neilly: No f-u way are we waiting till after school. Meet me in the hall.

So we excused ourselves from class and went straight to the hospital. I figured we could probably talk our way out of it, and if not, detention was better than sitting in biology class trying to memorize the stupid photosynthesis formula while my little sibling was entering the world.

But of course we got to the hospital and nothing much was happening. Dad popped out of the delivery room and announced that Carmen was fully dilated. “Like, her pupils or something?” I asked.

“Her cervix, idiot,” Neilly said, and, I mean, I like Carmen a lot—I may even love her in a totally parental kind of way—but I really wasn’t interested in any more updates on her lady parts.

Which was good, because Dad then disappeared for an hour and a half. Neilly and I sat there doing nothing, bored out of our minds from waiting and yet too excited to focus on anything.

Here’s how bad it was: I couldn’t even read the sex columns in the women’s magazines.

I worried and fretted until Neilly got sick of it and barked, “Will you stop pacing, sit down, and shut the hell up? Everything is fine!”

And it was. Dad came out looking as haggard as I can remember seeing him, tears running down his face, and said, his voice breaking with emotion, “So do you guys want to meet your little sister, or what?”

PROFANITY COUNT AND OTHER SENSITIVE WORDS

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RED FLAGS

Language
Drinking
Normalization
Sex
Sexualization
Suggestive wording
Porn not real
Drugs