



## Everybody Has Everything

*Katrina Onstad*

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What happens when the tidy, prosperous life of an urban couple is turned inside out by a tragedy with unexpected consequences? After a car crash leaves their friend Marcus dead and his wife Sarah in a coma, Ana and James are shocked to discover that they have become the legal guardians of a 2½-year-old, Finn. Finn's crash-landing in their lives throws into high relief deeply rooted, and sometimes long-hidden, truths about themselves, both individually and as a couple. Several chaotic, poignant, and life-changing weeks as a most unusual family give rise to an often unasked question: Can everyone be a parent?

## Everybody Has Everything Details

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Author : Katrina Onstad

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## From Reader Review Everybody Has Everything for online ebook

### Anna Pearce says

I hated this book.

Well, hate is a strong word. I was bored by this book.

I read a lot of books that are about terrible people doing terrible things, and I believed when I read the blurbs for this book that that was what it was. However, it's not about terrible people doing terrible things. It's about boring people doing boring things, and the sheer banality of the story made me keep questioning when the plot was actually going to begin.

I mentioned to my friend I was reading this book and that I couldn't understand the point or purpose of it. She suggested that this was a flaw in a lot of literary fiction - there is no point. But she was wrong, as was I. There is a point to this book. It's that marriage - maybe even life - has no reason if you don't have a child of your own, brought into your life in the right set of circumstances to buoy up your relationship with your spouse. As someone who is (to quote an Australian politician) deliberately barren, I find this idea so offensive I can barely stand it.

Finn, for all that he is the impetus of the plot, could be replaced by a particularly important dog. He has no real reaction to his parents' accident, no serious response to moving in with these relative strangers, asks no difficult questions and hardly changes in any way between the first page and the last one.

But what truly truly bothers me is that I picked this book up because it was on a list of books set in Toronto, and yet Toronto was so non-existent that the book could have been set anywhere. Ana spends a tiny amount of the book in Montreal, and that city gets more time, more sense of it as a physical location with history and weather and weight, than Toronto does. Toronto is a tiny collection of street names. I'm regularly near the places our protagonists frequent, and yet couldn't tell you where the heck this story was taking place because the location never actually mattered. Even as someone who hates Toronto and everything it stands for, I can tell you the city deserves better than that.

I hate this book. I'm sure the author (who has won a number of awards) is both a nice & thoughtful person, and the prose was interesting, but by the end all I felt was the dull plodding nature of the characters.

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### Bridget says

I won this book from Goodreads first reads.

This book was hard to get into. But once I did, it was hard to like. The two main characters, Ana and James, should not be parents! One thinks it's ok to cheat, the other has no interest in Finn, the child in the center of this book. As someone who waited several years for a child, this made me both mad and upset. The premise of the book is great, I just didn't care for how the author told it, and didn't like Ana and James.

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## **Suzanne says**

Author Katrina Onstad's clever writing style had me quickly wrapped up in the story of couple Ana and James, and the 2 ½-year-old boy who they suddenly become legal guardians of when his parents get into a car accident. Finn's dad, Marcus, dies in the crash, while his mom, Sarah is left in a coma. And now, without warning, a couple who has been trying for years to have a child (and are currently in the throes of the adoption process), have become instant parents.

Watching Ana and James' tidy and somewhat predictable lives get flipped upside down as they learn to care for another human being is fascinating, and I love how pitch-perfectly Onstad explores questions about parenting. Is being a parent something that just comes naturally when you have a child, or not? Is everyone well-suited to being a parent? While James seems to immediately, efficiently and happily take on his new role as father, Ana's experience is quite the opposite. It's extremely interesting to watch her come to this realization in her own way, discovering that maybe the standard narrative for a woman isn't the path she actually wants to follow.

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## **Krista says**

The plot of *Everybody Has Everything* is simple enough: Each around 40, James (a recently laid off TV host of documentaries at a public broadcaster) and Ana (pronounced like “on a moon”; a high-powered patent attorney) have accepted that they can't have children of their own, and just as they decide to start the process of adopting a baby from China, a couple who have become their recent but very good friends are in a car accident. The husband is dead on the scene, the wife is in a coma, and James and Ana realise that their recent agreement to become the couple's executors also means that they will get guardianship of a two-year-old boy, Finn – at least until his mother's condition improves...or deteriorates. All of this happens right away, the following occurring in the hospital on page 4:

“Give him to me,” he whispered hoarsely, angry at the time between the now and the boy he needed to put to his chest, angry that no one had given him over sooner. He grabbed the bundle, and My God, it was still warm, which meant it was alive – didn't it? And then something happened that was not of this earth, that was transporting, undenied. The bundle shook to life, let loose a howl never heard before, a howl from the place in a boy of all knowing, of the miles beneath the beneath, a sound of despair that rolled like a boulder over James. He held the boy closer, the boy who would soon be too big for this kind of holding, his legs dangling from James' torso, a sneaker on one foot, a dirty sock on the other, as if he had been running. The sticky black tar was not tar, James recognized finally, but blood. Blood in Finn's blonde hair that James was weeping into, keening along with him but holding on, holding him, the unbreakable, undroppable boy.

I include that longish passage to give the flavour of Katrina Onstad's writing, which I quite liked. The conflict of this plot is between the ways in which James and Ana react to instant parenthood, with James being a natural and Ana, not so much. Even with their back stories filled in, however, I don't know that I really bought these two as more than stock characters. James is a former wild child, now mostly concerned about hiding his bald spot while chatting up pretty girls; a man who *can't* hang up his coat when he gets

home. Ana is committed to her career – so, of *course* she's a partner-tracked lawyer – whose chaotic childhood makes her unlikely to abandon her marriage, even if she resents picking James' coat off the floor when she gets home late every night. Add a sticky-fingered toddler into the pristine upscale home of this *Odd Couple*, and it's no surprise who has to play the heavy. On top of this, I don't like coincidences like James and Ana hearing from a doctor one morning that they will never conceive a child and then having them attend the wedding of their new friends (where the bride is hugely pregnant) that same afternoon.

Onstad writes so very many lovely scenes in this book and they do and don't serve the bigger story. I found it very moving when James first lost his job and spent some time taking Finn to the park (pre-accident), and even though James *adored* playing at parenting, his feelings were hurt when Finn was excited to see his Dad home in the middle of an afternoon and ran off to hug him. On the other hand, I didn't like the scene where Finn goes missing and the neighbourhood forms a search party – as everyone introduced themselves for the first time, it felt like a heavy-handed commentary on urban disconnection, especially coming straight on the heels of a confrontation between James and one of these same neighbours. More heavy-handed scenes were inserted to comment on the questionable morality of Chinese adoptions, the farmer-bullying tactics of a Monsanto-type corporation, and the dumbing down of television (as it relates to the zombifying of children and the deterioration of public television). On the other hand, I liked this very much:

“I don't want to be a mother,” she said blandly. James breathed. He saw her suddenly as something barely held together, like a stack of sticks that happened to be piled up on the chair. She was a liar. There was a lie in their house. Anger welled up in him.

In the end, this was a bit of an uneven read, but I was satisfied overall.

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### **Will says**

This is an intelligent and beautifully-written work, which grew on me with a second reading. (I do that often now, even for books I don't care for that much, as writing in GR has made me realize how much I miss the first time through)

The writing is a little ethereal but the main characters, James and Ana, are well developed and sensitively drawn. The childless couple become the guardians of 2-year-old Finn when his father is killed, and mother Sarah is severely injured and left in a coma, in a car accident. James discovers that fatherhood suits him perfectly, while Ana, a type-A lawyer, is quite uncomfortable in her role and it eventually becomes a confirmation that she never wanted to be a mother, and further opens up rifts in their marriage. Some elements are a little formulaic – Ana's chaotic childhood with a loving but rather unstable mother and absent father; James's reserved and distant upbringing – are a bit too obvious in shaping their respective personalities, but there is nothing clichéd in any of the characters. There are so many little vignettes here too – such as James's wealthy brother and family, or Ana's lawyer party – that could have been caricatures but there is always something redeeming and human in each.

Yes, they are all flawed in some way but that makes them all the more real; Onstad makes me feel as though I've known these people. (I wondered whether “everything” referred to the baggage that “everyone” carries around?). I don't understand, BTW, how some GR reviewers dislike the book because of the *characters'* flaws?

However I must admit that the ending, (view spoiler) - all compressed into the final chapter - is certainly unsatisfactory and rushed. At least James, Sarah and Finn didn't (view spoiler) but those last 20-odd pages don't do the novel justice.

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### **Christine Callihoe says**

I could not put this book down. Ana is the kind of character I could completely relate to And I found myself completely immersed in the story.

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### **Lori Bamber says**

A bit of context: I read this book on vacation, so basically over 12 hours with a few breaks for meals and naps. And I read it right after I finished a Tana French mystery and watched two episodes of The Killing on Netflix, so I had zero appetite for a slow pace.

Everybody Has Everything did not disappoint. All of the characters in this book are deeply flawed (you know, just like the rest of us) and Onstad doesn't sugarcoat their weaknesses or blur them with inauthentic, socially appropriate behaviour. In Ana, we see the conflicted and inconsistent responses to motherhood that naturally occur in a society in which being a woman is supposed to automatically encompass wanting to be a mother and being capable of mothering. This despite the fact that motherhood is an enormous, completely life-altering challenge, and many - like Ana - grow up without any model of adequate parenting in their lives.

James, her husband, is much more maternal, but isn't terribly effective at life - a lot like Ana's mother.

Despite their flaws, I found myself caring for James and Ana - unlike some antiheroes we meet in novels (the protagonist in Ian McEwan's Solar comes to mind) they try desperately to be good people, and to do their best for each other. They see each other's brokenness, and love anyway.

In addition to creating an entertaining, engaging book, Katrina Onstad has achieved the aim of the best novelists: she has enlarged the space in which we can think and talk about important subjects. Motherhood, fertility, urban life, neighbours, siblings, parenting, marriage, love, monogamy, devotion, caring for aged or ill parents - all are up for examination here.

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### **Jenn says**

This review was originally published at: <http://wp.me/p1vzzU-jr>

Katrina Onstad's latest book explores one of the more controversial topics of today's society: parenthood, and the decision (by choice or otherwise) of some couples not to go down that road. Ana and James have been married for many years, and have tried all the conventional means to have children without success. Busy with their respective careers, they half-heartedly begin the process for adoption overseas. While they are in the midst of this process, however, their friends Marcus and Sarah are in a car accident. Marcus is killed, and Sarah is in a coma, leaving their small son Finn in the care of Ana and James. Suddenly, instead

of talking about parenting in abstract, they are thrust into the role without preparation.

What makes this book such a compelling read are the characters. Ana and James are flawed individuals, but they are realistic in their weaknesses. Ana must confront her deepest fears about motherhood, including whether or not she actually wants to be a mother. Her career is important to her; she is successful and important, and she loves what she does. James, on the other hand, has had a kind of one-note career. Coasting on past success, he has failed to move with the times and is no longer the charming and informed writer and tv host he once was. Instead, he spends his days pretending to write in indie coffee shops while contemplating how he can return to his former days of glory while obsessing about his appearance. Surprisingly, it is James who adapts best to life as a parent to two and half-year-old Finn. His instincts kick in, and he and Finn develop a rhythm to their days that is all the more heart-wrenching in how obviously Ana cannot fit into their patterns.

This doesn't make them likeable as people – but they are achingly familiar and you cannot help but see yourself and others you know through their behaviours. Ana is successful at work, but she doesn't relate well to other women. While she professes to want children, she cannot connect with any of the children that she encounters with family and friends, including Finn. James looks for validation through the acknowledgement of his work, even going so far as to make some rather devastating decisions that ultimately impact his marriage. Neither is without blame; the addition of Finn exposes the cracks and hidden issues in their marriage that neither had been prepared to face. All is not dour and gloomy, though, as Onstad is able to weave tension-breaking humour into her observations before plunging you back into the lives of her characters.

The other characters in the book, including Finn, are less defined, as if we are only seeing them through James and Ana's filter. This is a shame, as the relationship between Marcus and Sarah is so different that the two marriages would have made for an interesting comparison in greater detail. Finn is a character of innocence in the book, and he is the bar by which the other characters are measured. Characters who appeared mindless or trivial come into focus when Finn is added to the picture, demonstrating empathy and understanding not found in their first meeting.

One more minor thing that I loved – this is a Toronto-based book, and it is unafraid to be local. Characters wander on Queen Street, travel on Lakeshore and take the train from Union to Montreal. It's a little thing, but I love it when the city setting is talked about as a living part of the story and not as a travelogue feature. Being from Toronto, it makes it all the more real to me, and added a further connection to the story.

Ultimately, the story ends as it should – not with a happily-ever-after, but with a happy-for-right-now that fits the characters and how they have developed over the story. It's not an ending that will satisfy everyone, but I was pleased with it, and thought it was true to the characters (and no, I'm not going to tell you what happens – read the book!).

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### **Laurie • The Baking Bookworm says**

This book review, as well as many more, can also be found on my blog,  
[www.thebakingbookworm.blogspot.ca](http://www.thebakingbookworm.blogspot.ca).

Synopsis: Professional couple Ana and James have successful careers but unfortunately have struggled for years with infertility. Years of watching their friends become parents and slowly alienate childless Ana and

James have taken their toll on the couple. After numerous unsuccessful rounds of fertility treatments they have started the adoption process in China hoping for a child of their own.

One night Ana and James receive a phone call telling them that their friend Marcus has been killed in a car crash and that Marcus' wife is in a coma. Though friends with this other couple Ana and James are still shocked to learn that they have been named as guardian for the couple's two and a half year old son, Finn.

The sudden addition of Finn into their busy lives isn't the way that either Ana or James had envisioned becoming parents. The stress of sudden parenthood to a toddler begins to show the strengths and weaknesses in Ana and James' marriage as well as Ana's internal struggle about becoming a mother.

**My Thoughts:** This book doesn't hold back and jumps right into the fray showcasing the highly sensitive topic of parenthood. Specifically the emotions, stress and fear that some people have regarding parenthood. Is every woman hardwired to be a mother? Is it socially acceptable for a woman to be ambivalent towards motherhood or will society judge her harshly and openly? These are only some of the questions that are raised in this second book by Canadian author Katrina Onstad.

I have to admit that it was the premise of this childless couple being suddenly handed this toddler that enticed me to request this book from the publisher. I was interested to see how this couple's life would change with the 'disruption' of a small human into their orderly lives. A 'sink or swim' situation involving Pampers and sippy cups, if you will.

Once Finn is plunked down into their lives Ana and James figure they'll be able to handle this 2 year old. Parenting is what they've always wanted, right? While James seems to bond quickly with Finn, Ana just doesn't feel the same attachment and begins to pull away emotionally. She begins to re-evaluate what she really wants in her life and is surprised to learn that motherhood may not be what she truly desires. Does that make her a oddity when all of her friends are thinking about babies all the time? Ana and James' very organized life suddenly becomes chaotic and unstable and begins to influence their marriage.

One of my favourite things about this book was seeing the honest portrayal of Ana's struggle to figure out what she truly wants in life. How she comes to term with the fact that perhaps motherhood isn't necessarily the perfect life for her. Not an easy thing to admit after years of infertility treatments and a society that places motherhood on a high pedestal.

One of the strengths of this book are the characters. Onstad's main characters are very relatable and believable, each with their own issues, flaws and strengths. I could relate to Ana on the whole 'Type A' personality (being one myself) but I have to admit that she came off a bit colder and harsher than I was expecting. That said my heart did go out to her as she obviously struggled with what she wanted. This poor woman wasn't given any time to adjust to motherhood yet was expected to just pick up the reigns of motherhood with no notice whatsoever.

James, while he took to parenting easily and was so great with Finn, wasn't without his own faults. Let's just say that I had a hard time getting past some of the choices he made in this book. He was a true dichotomy of good dad and crappy husband. I would have loved to get into James' head on a deeper level if only to understand his obsession with street parking (which I admit baffled me a bit since it took over more of the book than I was expecting).

This was an enjoyable read with a character driven storyline that is perfect if you're in the mood to spark some great discussions.

Note: Can I also add that I adore it when a Canadian author isn't afraid to show that her book is set in Canada?! I loved seeing references around the Toronto area that even I knew. A refreshing and patriotic shout out to Canada. Gotta love it (especially on Canada Day weekend, eh?).

My Rating: 3 stars

Note: My sincere thanks to Net Galley and McClelland and Stewart Publishing for providing this book to me in exchange for my honest review.

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### **Aban (Aby) says**

This book had a good review in the *Globe and Mail*, but I found it disappointing. The story line is interesting: a childless couple, Ana and James find themselves taking care of a two and a half year old boy, Finn, when his parents are involved in a car accident. James takes to fatherhood immediately; Ana, however, finds she doesn't want to be a mother and feels excluded. The story traces the progress of James and Ana, both as a couple and as surrogate parents. The characterization is also strong: the protagonists emerge as very real people. I think my criticism then must lie with the language and style in which the book was written. I did not find myself gripped by the book which, given its story line and characterization, I should have been.

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### **Meggan says**

At first, I assumed this was a based-on-true-facts memoir-type book and I couldn't figure out why someone would choose to paint themselves in such an unflattering light, but it's a work of fiction.

I had to set this down a couple of times because I was so frustrated that Ana didn't seem to have a single redeeming quality. Sure, James was annoying and douchey, but at least he was a great dad to Finn. I guess Ana was good at her job? I don't know. I feel bad disliking her but she was just so unlikeable! What in the world did James see in her?!

And don't get me started on James's brother Mike. UGH. Scenes with him were merely an excuse to uncomfortably ogle fictional rich people. It felt gross.

And every time a kid threw a fit in this book, there were fountains of snot and tears. Like, yeah, tantrums can make kids snotty but they are not typically FLINGING SNOT PARTICLES EVERYWHERE AND UGH WHYYYY

Part of my lack of enjoyment of this book was due to my own initial misunderstanding of the premise, and I take responsibility for that. But I also found most of the characters supremely unlikeable and while the story and premise were fine, I couldn't get over the fact that I disliked basically everyone except Sarah, who was in a coma for practically the whole book.

I always feel horrible when I don't enjoy a book, but... I COULDN'T DO IT AND I'M SORRY.

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## **Kimberly says**

3.5 stars.

I won this book through Goodreads First Reads, and plowed through it in about two and a half days. The characters in this story are very well-drawn, though not always likable, and I was anxious to see what happened to them. Here's my little breakdown, hopefully without giving too much away.

James: I feel like everybody knows a guy like James--that fiercely intelligent, opinionated, sort of cocky guy who is never going to really grow up. This doesn't make James an unlikable person--in fact, apart from Finn and Sarah, James is the warmest character in the book. You just end up feeling bad for him as he tries to mesh being a good father to Finn with still wanting to act like he's 25.

Ana: I didn't dislike Ana, *per se*, but she's probably not someone I would care to know in real life. My frustration with Ana is her constant self-imposed guilt trip about not being able to have kids. James doesn't fault her for it and no one else in the book puts her down for not having children, but she constantly judges herself when she says she doesn't have any. Why? I was also deeply annoyed by her refusal to just tell James she didn't want to be a mother. I'm a firm believer that if you don't want kids, you should not have them. Ana totally falls into the societal trap of women being judged for not having children, even though no one in the book seems to care that she doesn't. I kind of wanted her to get over herself. And yet, I admired how she tried with Finn even as I cringed at how clueless she was.

Finn: pretty decently written for a two year old.

Sarah: Obviously created to be a polar opposite of Ana...soft, round, and warm as opposed to Ana's sharp angles and cold demeanor.

Anyway, overall I thought this book was a very well-written modern novel with strong characters. It's timely, too, since our culture is increasingly obsessed with pregnancy and motherhood. I wish Ana had been a bit more confident in her decision to avoid motherhood, because that may have made her more identifiable to women who also are unsure or positive that they do not want children.

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## **Ann Douglas says**

A fast-paced novel with compelling characters. Recommended.

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## **Kendra says**

I would've given this book five stars, but for the ending! I think it deserves 4.5 stars from me. After reading Katrina Onstad's debut novel earlier this year, I was quite eager to read her sophomore novel, because she's a writer who taps into the urban ennui with great clarity.

James and Ana are fortyish DINKs living in Toronto. They've been trying for a baby, without success. When the novel opens, their good friends have just been in a car accident. The husband dies and the wife is in a

coma, leaving the couple's two-year-old son, Finn, in James and Ana's custody. It's an interesting premise to present a childless couple dealing suddenly with a toddler. Of course hilarity ensues when Finn comes to their immaculate home, disturbing their life with his presence. However, the novel is more often tragic: Finn wants to hear the 'light' song before bedtime, but only his comatose mother knows what song he means. Moments like these are scattered liberally throughout the book, as both James and Ana separately re-examine their lives.

The novel's ending was far too ambiguous for me. However, overall I found the writing and topic to be peerless.

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### **Kelly Hollett says**

This book was a pretty good read - it was an interesting one in that the two main characters are not very likable. I read it quickly and I was in need of a quick read at the time. Not sure if I'd recommend it, but I enjoyed it for the most part.

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