



Stranger Things Happen

Kelly Link

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This first collection by award-winning author Kelly Link takes fairy tales and cautionary tales, dictators and extraterrestrials, amnesiacs and honeymooners, revenants and readers alike, on a voyage into new, strange, and wonderful territory. The girl detective must go to the underworld to solve the case of the tap-dancing bank robbers. A librarian falls in love with a girl whose father collects artificial noses. A dead man posts letters home to his estranged wife. Two women named Louise begin a series of consecutive love affairs with a string of cellists. A newly married couple become participants in an apocalyptic beauty pageant. Sexy blond aliens invade New York City. A young girl learns how to make herself disappear.

These eleven extraordinary stories are quirky, spooky, and smart. They all have happy endings. Every story contains a secret prize. Each story was written especially for you.

Stories from *Stranger Things Happen* have won the *Nebula*, *Tiptree*, and *World Fantasy Award*. *Stranger Things Happen* was a *Salon Book of the Year*, one of the *Village Voice's* 25 Favorite Books of 2001, and was nominated for the *Firecracker Alternative Book Award*.

Contents:

- *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose* (1998)
- *Water Off a Black Dog's Back* (1995)
- *The Specialist's Hat* (1998)
- *Flying Lessons* (1995)
- *Travels with the Snow Queen* (1996/1997)
- *Vanishing Act* (1996)
- *Survivor's Ball, or, The Donner Party* (1998)
- *Shoe and Marriage* (2000)
- *Most of My Friends Are Two-Thirds Water* (2001)
- *Louise's Ghost* (2001)
- *The Girl Detective* (1999)

Cover painting by Shelley Jackson

Stranger Things Happen Details

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From Reader Review Stranger Things Happen for online ebook

Res says

I'm afraid there's a sameness to Link's writing. Grotesquerie, quirky refusal of all resolution. It's a delight for one story (especially when you encounter it somewhere like F&SF, surrounded by the trite and self-serious) but in a collection it quickly becomes annoying.

Favorite stories: "The Specialist's Hat," "The Girl Detective."

Ian says

The only reason I finished this book is because I read *Magic for beginners* first and I liked that one slightly more than this collection.

In the end, I guess Link just isn't for me. I like my stories to make sense, to have some internal logic and structure I can follow and, possibly, an ending or a hint of an explanation my mind can work upon.

Link's stories instead feel to me more like a dream - scenes, images, moments where time slows down like molasses or jumps all over the place, where strange things happen without reason beyond 'odd is cool'. The characters felt just as dreamlike, devoid of life and motivations, and I couldn't really sympathize with them. I finished every segment asking myself what actually happened, and why, and why should I care.

If you like when people tell you their latest weird dreams, Kelly Link's books are definitely up your alley. If you're looking for stories, well, they're not.

Glenn Zorpette says

The stories are unusual and not at all predictable. But they're dull. They seem to have been written to impress critics or other authors with their strangeness. The author seems to delight in showing us how clever and creative she can be. For example, there's lots of cute but ultimately meaningless word play. Unfortunately, the stories are not compelling or engrossing at all.

Regarding its favorable reviews: I'd say there's a major "Emperor's New Clothes" effect with this book. To compare her with Borges and Chandler, as Salon did, is absurd. Borges and Chandler managed to be innovators while writing utterly engrossing stories. Link hasn't figured out how to do that.

Mike (the Paladin) says

I sort of feel I should apologize for this rating. I picked this up on the strength of some good ratings and reviews here. But I just didn't like this book. I don't mean to be hard to get along with, but I found the stories rather silly.

Again, I'm sorry if you like this book and please enjoy...

I wanted to like this book. Based on what I'd read I picked it up ready for some enjoyable weird stories. The first one left me cold...the "dead man" exploring his situation (and also his genitals. This was the most "grope happy corpse I ever heard of). He finally puts it all together..whoopee.

I almost put the book down there but I thought, no give it a chance. To Me...let me emphasize that again "To Me" the next story and "the father's nose collection" were just as silly. It was like a book of television episode outlines, something that might have been seen on the old "Night Gallery" series.

Okay sorry, if you enjoy this please continue to enjoy. If I want weird tales I'll go back to H.P. Lovecraft and the like. I just found this one not for me.

I almost went with one star...but I didn't actually hate it. I just didn't find it worth the time to read. Sorry I see a lot of you like or even love this collection, not me however.

mark monday says

it's not me, it's you, Stranger Things Happen. what is it the kids say these days? I just can't. I'm just not that into you. but it's not my fault! God knows I was patient and I tried to be supportive and I tried and I tried and I tried. a whole long month of trying. I just can't with you though. and not to play the blame game, but seriously it's all your fault, not mine!

you have talent to burn so I don't blame myself for having high expectations. you're like a combo of Aimee Bender and, as others have said, Robert Aickman and Angela Carter. now those are two of my favorite authors (and Bender is pretty great too) so how could I not expect something amazing? or at the very least absorbing. but you didn't absorb me at all, quite the opposite. you were a chore to read, all the quirk and eccentricity and ambiguity curdled into something precious and cutesie-poo and not at all refreshing. your characters felt like they were held at arm's length from me so there was little to draw me into caring about their tiresome, fragile little lives. all of the attempts to tie their trials and tribulations into various fairy tales and fables didn't resonate; it just felt like being clever to be clever, or putting on too much make-up and jewelry instead of letting any inner beauty shine. you made a dazzling first impression (especially that cover!) but I soon realized we had very little to talk about.

still, you're no 1-star relationship. we did have that weekend together, "The Specialist's Hat". it was a wonderful weekend, eerie and endearing and chilling and just the right kind of strange. I loved it! a perfect weekend. for that, at least, you get 2 stars.

Ori Fienberg says

This book will sleep with you on the first date. Then when you wake up beside it in the early morning you will spend some serious time considering whether it was great, or whether it would have been better to wait a bit.

For me it was a bit wild, which I like, from a book, but also a little cold, a little impersonal. This book may have issues with nymphomania. It's definately ready and willing to give you a thrill, but even though you've spent some time with it, it still doesn't quite love you back. Sometimes I like a quickie on the T, or during my

lunch break, but I really want to feel like the book loves me back. This relationship was fun, but I just don't feel like the commitment was really there.

Don't get me wrong; I like this book, but in several of the stories I felt as though the strangeness was there to be strange, and that's not enough for me. I think the best surrealists and fantasy writers can tap easily into strange, but even the cryptic moments come together for cohesive delight.

One story in this collection is not to be missed. In "Vanishing Act" the strangeness is more subtle, and the magic totally feasible. The characters feel the most real, the most lovingly conceived, and I, the reader, love it without reservation for its uncanny mixture of tragedy and hope.

This is a first collection, maybe the second collection will still have that spontaneity I love, but with a little more of the maturity I crave. From books.

Leah says

"Stranger Things Happen" is Kelly Link's freshman work of fiction. Within it are eleven exquisitely crafted short stories which range from weird to the truly bizarre. It is difficult to categorize Link's writing, as it seems to straddle science fiction and fantasy, narrative and fiction, real and unreal.

"The Specialist's Hat" is really one of the spookiest stories I have ever read. It is loosely written (as are many of the stories), which - rather than impeding the text - makes it easier to adapt. Her writing seems to permeate right into one's head, letting the reader formulate each story by themselves while being gently urged on by Link. She guides, but does not dictate, the reader. As a result, one makes each story one's own: This compounds how generally creepy her writing is.

The stories are also punctuated with truly odd characters. In "Water off a Black Dog's Back," the boy's girlfriend's father is a bizarre character. He is lacking a nose, and therefore replaces it with a prosthesis according to circumstance -- sometimes a wooden one, sometimes a steel one. Link again keeps her writing somewhat vague, but defined enough to paint a rather striking - and oddly frightening - picture of rural life under her twisted pen.

The fact that this is Link's first book shows, however. While her writing is strong (she shows remarkable talent), there are immature aspects to it, as well. Her stories can be somewhat "plotless" - they are more like literary sketches of disturbing scenarios. Although, this is also what renders her writing so captivating: She makes a story out of some strange event. She does not present a problem to be solved, a climax, a resolution. It's almost as if she leaves that to the reader, choosing instead to lay the groundwork for one's mind to grind away at -- as a reader, we torment ourselves thinking more of what Link has written than what is actually on the page.

Kudos to Link for her uncanny ability to turn the familiar into the frightening. Her writing conveys a sense of uneasiness, she manages to make the most normal circumstances into the most disturbing. She is an excellent, captivating writer.

Kayıp R?ht?m says

Tuhaf ?eyler Oluyor, Kelly Link’in 2001’de yay?mlad??? ve ge?ti?imiz sene Aylak Kitap taraf?ndan dilimize kazand?r?lan bir ?ykü kitab?.

Hikâye üzerine dü?ünmeyi severim. Bazen çok deneysel öyküler gelir, bazen öyle postmoderndir(?) ki i?ler neden o ?ekilde geli?ti, hiç anlamam. Alt metinler, üst metinler ve metinleraras?l?k çarklar? aras?nda ç?nenirken öyküyü yakalamaya çal???r?m.

Bazen öykü hemen oradadır. Uzansan?z yeti?ecek gibisinizdir. Üstü biraz puslu, etraf? biraz da???n?k, kimlikler biraz evde kalm?? gibidir. Gözlerinizi k?s?p dikkatle bakman?z gerekir. Orada oldu?unu bir kere sezmi?sinizdir. Bir ?ekilde ona ula?may? ba?ar?rsan?z kesinlikle memnun olacaksınız?zd?r. Odaklanman?z gerekir.

21. yüzy?lda birisinden odaklanmas?n? istemek iddial? bir taleptir. Bo?a ç?karsa ba???n?z yanar. Kelly Link ve öyküleri hakk?nda konu?mak biraz da bu yüzden zor. (Zor oldu?undan bahsetmemi?tim, ama siz yine de bir türlü konu?maya giremeyen anlat?c?n?z?n buhran?ndan durumu çarçabuk yakalad?n?z.)

Kitab? okurken asla yeterince odaklan?p odaklanamad???mdan emin olamad?m. Bir ?eyleri sürekli kaç?r?yor gibiydim. Büyük ?eyler oluyordu o öykülerde. Resmin tamam?na hakim de?il gibiydim ve bu beni rahats?z ediyordu. Okumas? de?il, okumas? kesinlikle müthi? keyifli bir kitapt?. Sadece hakk?nda birkaç söz edecek oldu?umda, “Ben çok sevdim, ama biraz...” deyip duraklamama neden oluyordu.

Ama biraz neydi? Neden emin olam?yordum? Sonra bu yaz?n?n ba???na oturdumda bir kez daha dü?ündüm. Kitab?n ilk öyküsü “Karanfil, Zambak, Zambak, Gül” bu süreçte bana yardım? oldu.

Bu kitap belirsizlikler hakk?ndayd?. ?nsan huzurunun en büyük dü?manı, geceleri yast???n so?uk taraf?n? ararken içimize çöreklenen o illet his, i?te somut bir ?ekilde önümüzdeydi! Hal böyle olunca kitab? okurken bütün resme hakim olamay???m beni susturamad?. Zaten hayat?m?z?n büyük bir kesimi belirsizlik bulamac?nda kaybolup gidiyordu. Zaten gece yar?s? ans?z?n içimize oturan ve kalkmay? da pek sevmeyen bu his, hayat?m?z?n çok büyük bir parças?yd?.

Öyleyse belirsizli?in pusunu sap?na kadar hissetti?imiz bu kitab?n bana vermi? oldu?u, “Ama...”lar? rafa kald?rabilirdim.

Seda Çingay’?n çevirdi?i Tuhaf ?eyler Oluyor’u, Özgür Arslan yay?na haz?rlam??. Çeviri hakk?nda yorum yapamam fakat, imla ad?na -özellikle sonlara do?ru- biraz fazla hataya ?ahit olduk, üzücüydü. Bunun d???nda, Aylak Kitap’a bu isabetli tercihlerinden ötürü te?ekkür etmek isterim.

Damaklarda Karin Tidbeck’in “Zeplin”i tad? b?rakacakken son anda çenenize bir yumruk sallayarak dilinizi ?s?rtt?ran bir kitap. Çünkü kendi ad? ve kendi tad? var.

Odaklanmaktan çekinmeyen, sab?rl? okurlar için!

- **Onur SELAMET**

?ncelemenin tamam? için: <http://www.kayiprihtim.org/portal/inc...>

Milica says

Sjajno, sjajno, sjajno. Iluzija hvala :D

Rachael Sherwood says

Kelly Link is one of those authors that, if she wrote novel length fiction, I think would be held up alongside Neil Gaiman as one of the greatest living writers and inspire similarly devoted and obsessed fans.

But her wheelhouse is the short story, and this is no country for short story writers. Still, she has her own cult following of devoted fans, and their passionate recommendations drove me to picking up this collection.

I liked this collection a lot. There are a few duds, as in most short story collections, but even the duds have something interesting going on. For example, the first story, "Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose", didn't grab me as others, but I still found her description of a dead man writing letters to his estranged wife, which he puts in a post box that empties into the sea, to be quite evocative.

Reading Link's stories is liberating. They are comfortable in their strangeness. There are no obsessive attempts to "world build" or explain how or why things are happening. They have dream logic: things happen because they are happening, and the goal is to go along with the narrative and enjoy the sights. The writing is very good. It is dreamy, but tightly controlled. In *Lousie's Ghost*, which features two protagonists of the same name, Link alternates between clearly differentiating between the two Louises and blurring them together, which mirrors their independent personalities and codependent friendship.

What I really liked about the collection is that while the stories are detached from reality, they are not so light that they float away. They are tethered to the earth with a strange, precise personalness. Link doesn't give you the impression that she is writing weird stuff to be weird, but just because when she opens her mouth to tell a story, it comes out this way. Under all the strangeness, there is a realness that resonates with readers. You may not have a frigging clue what is happening in a story, but you still feel pain, sadness, love, joy, fear, etc. An incredible accomplishment on Link's part.

My favorites were the very scary "The Specialist's Hat" & the feminist fairy tale "Travels with the Snow Queen."

Punk says

Short Stories. This was stamped "science fiction" by the library, but these short, fantastic stories have more in common with magical realism and retold fairy tales than science- or even speculative fiction. Plenty of ghosts, being dead, being haunted, dating a son of Zeus, searching for the lover that the Snow Queen stole away -- that sort of thing.

Written with a light hand, these stories are bittersweet, spooky, absurd, crazy, and freeing. Each one is perfectly self-contained, but taken together it's easy to see hints of a bigger world, tiny details that make you

think everything might be related, so the book on the whole feels nicely tied together. Link even writes in such experimental forms as second person and present tense, which is not something you see very often in published fiction. She treats the fantastic like it's ordinary, and the ordinary like it might be something secretly fantastic, and I loved every moment of it.

Five stars. Link writes great short stories. And I say this as someone who does not generally enjoy a short story. But these I'm going to read again and again.

Jamie says

Oct 2010: It may sound strange but I love the twitchy ambiguities of October, and to wit, there are certain—whatever you call them—requirements, traditions—cravings?—I indulge from year to year. As soon as there are cinders and smoke in the air and the nights turn all crisp and inky, I stay up past midnight with the windows open out over the farm and read “Water Off A Black Dog’s Back.”

Like a kid who doesn’t believe in anything, ghost stories are the best.

Sept 2009: If you ever wanted me to read a book, any book, you would promise me this: you would promise fairy tales and cautionary tales, dictators, extraterrestrials, amnesiacs, honeymooners, revenants and ghosts. You would promise to be seriously spooky and smart. You would also promise happy endings, bizarre and sad dreams, and somehow, Nancy Drew.

“Every story contains a secret prize,” promises the dust jacket. “Each story was written especially for you.”

Candiss says

I really love Kelly Link's writing style. It falls somewhere between magical realist and full-blown surreal, and it manages to be very emotionally affecting without sacrificing subtlety. It is frequently surprising, often delightful, occasionally horrific. Link can get me to agree to suspend my disbelief in some of the most wildly imaginative and implausible situations, and she has a real knack for being gently disturbing.

However, I am only giving this collection, Link's earliest, (which focuses largely on referenced, re-imagined, and re-arranged fairy tales, myths, and legends) 3 stars, because 3.5 isn't an option, and I loved her collection *Magic for Beginners* considerably more. (It was simply stellar.) These stories are worth the reader's time, and some are downright brilliant. But some left me neutral, and the overall feeling I was left with was one less bowled-over than when I'd finished *Magic For Beginners*.

My recommendation: If you've never read Kelly Link, start with *Magic for Beginners*, as it was wonderful and whimsical and weird and freaky and creepy across the board. Then, if you enjoy that, explore her earlier work in this collection, *Stranger Things Happen*.

Dan says

"Um, he's sick. My best friend's sister's boyfriend's brother's girlfriend heard from this guy who knows this kid who's going with the girl who saw Ferris pass out at 31 Flavors last night. I guess it's pretty serious. "

That was funny in Ferris Buehler's Day off. It was just a couple lines. Now imagine an entire book done in that same sort of frantic voice. No real authority or ownership of the events that happened, just a string of hearsay from a high school girl. If you can do that, you understand what you are in for with this collection of short stories.

Still not clear enough? Ok - imagine a book where the goal is not to entertain or teach anything, but instead to try and convince everyone else that they were clever. When you get to the end of a short story, it isn't clever. . . the feeling is just one where I was left asking "so what"? It is the kind of thing where if you are expecting more - you are just not smart enough to get it says the rabble in the room. Nope. I got it. It just isn't compelling, interesting, entertaining or insightful in any real way.

I had to keep checking back to see that this book was written by Kelly Link and not Lois Cook. Yikes. To be fair, KL's grammar was fine I suppose. . .

Hey! Here is some Cinderella Fan Fic where the prince doesn't find her and instead develops a foot fetish. He spends his time going around being broken and creepy with a glass slipper in his pocket. I just saved you 30 pages. You are welcome.

On to the next story (every story) written in a stream of consciousness style where the reader is kept at an arms length but I am sure makes perfect sense to the 12 year old girl who was being channeled. I imagine little hearts above every dotted "i" if this were written on paper.

I had to commit to finishing this book because I think it is unfair to review a book that you have not finished. That being said, I LOVE to read. This book made me find other things to do over and over and postpone finishing it. A book that makes me not want to read is a book that I want to tell others not to read either. At least my office is really clean and organized.

Melanie says

Jamie Quatro ruined me for ballsy contemporary short fiction, she set the bar with 'I Want To Show You More', and Miranda July is up there too.

I really wanted to love this, but it's just a tad too cute, light and just very detached. Props for mischief, enjoy some sass and comedy - but otherwise, meh. Just not my cup of milo.

Natasha says

I'm obviously missing something, but Kelly Link stories read like this: " A man was walking on a black beach. A wave bit his finger off. He saw a purple cloud. The end. " Just don't get it. Too absurd for me.

Althea Ann says

Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose

The ghost(?) of a man stuck in a strange limbo tries fruitlessly to remember his wife's name. Through his monologue, a sad story gradually emerges.

Water Off a Black Dog's Back

A young librarian meets an attractive girl as she's returning a book in worse-than-dog-eared condition. A love affair quickly starts - but when she takes him home to meet the family, he's drawn straight into a Southern Gothic nightmare.

The Specialist's Hat

Previously read in Link's 'Pretty Monsters' collection, as well as in 'Crossroads: Tales of the Southern Literary Fantastic' and in a Year's Best collection. This is a well-anthologized story! It's also available free on Link's site: <http://www.kellylink.net/fiction/link...>

Creepy! Creepy, creepy, creeeeeepy! If you buy, and move into a haunted house, you PROBABLY should check the babysitter's references, and maybe her ID, too, before you leave your young children with her. Better yet, just get the hell out of that house before it's too late.

Flying Lessons

"Going to hell, instructions and advice..."

Fractured and reconstructed, a modern myth that follows a kleptomaniac innkeeper's daughter (well, actually, it's a British bed & breakfast catering to the tourist trade...) Weird connections, and more than a hint of Eurydice...

Travels with the Snow Queen

An adult retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's tale. Here, Link reimagines Gerda and Kay not as innocent children but as two contemporary adults in a dysfunctional relationship. A strong feminist message is the main takeaway, as Link turns the original story on its head.

Vanishing Act

Hildy has always envied her cousin, Jenny Rose, who gets to travel around the world with her missionary parents. But after Jenny Rose is sent to live with them, her feelings change. Jenny Rose is quiet, uncommunicative - the reader can tell, traumatized - but we see things only from the child Hildy's perspective. But Hildy is more perceptive than any of those around her, who gradually seem to stop noticing Jenny Rose at all...

Survivor's Ball, or, The Donner Party

Imagine the weird and unpleasant dream that you might have after watching a TV show about the Donner

Party. Your relationship problems, random things from your day, problems with your teeth, and snippets of the TV show are all mixed together into somethings that's half nightmare and half just... interesting.

Shoe and Marriage

Really, this one is four separate short pieces on a similar theme.

The first is a feminist take-off on Cinderella. The second, a dream/nightmare inspired by televised beauty pageants. The third: What if Imelda Marcos (or someone like her) was actually sympathetic, once you understood her background? Fourth: An encounter with a fortune-teller.

Most of My Friends Are Two-Thirds Water

Have you ever noticed that there's a certain type of blonde woman? They all look alike. Maybe they're actually aliens.

Louise's Ghost

One Louise has the strange ghost of a naked man in her house. Her best friend, also Louise, likes to sleep with cellists. Her young daughter is obsessed with the color green.

The Girl Detective

Is the narrator the plucky girl detective? Or is she detecting the girl detective? Nancy Drew meets the Twelve Dancing Princesses, through a weird kaleidoscope.

Debnance says

A book of surreal short stories that would vie with Hurakami for the strangest stories I've ever read. Unlike Hurakami, however, there is no Kafkaesque feeling of alienation; the odd people in these stories seem generally content with the craziness of their lives. What kind of stories are these? Here's a list from the back cover: "The girl detective must go to the underworld to solve the case of the tap-dancing bank robbers. A librarian falls in love with a girl whose father collects artificial noses. A dead man posts letters home to his estranged wife. Two women named Louise begin a series of consecutive love affairs with a string of cellists...."

Sometimes, when I read odd stories like these, I get the feeling the author is just trying to be weird in order to be weird. I didn't feel that way while reading this book. Reading the stories felt like the author was relating them exactly as he'd seen them in a vision or a dream.

I'd have to say that even though I read all the way to the end I'm not sure how much I took away from the book. I didn't remember any of the details of the book until I looked over the story titles.

Elena says

2.5 stars. I was tempted to give this three stars, because a lot of my reaction wasn't that these stories were

bad, just that they weren't for me. But boy, were they not for me.

My first exposure to Kelly Link's writing was through her YA collection *Pretty Monsters: Stories*. I loved it. "Magic for Beginners" is still one of my all-time favorite stories. So I was excited to read her two adult collections, this and *Magic for Beginners*. I started with this, her earlier collection, and proceeded to be extremely disappointed.

For the most part, these stories reminded me unpleasantly of my least favorite literature classes in college, the ones where all the pretentious English majors would say things like, "I loved how the diamond motif perfectly reflected the unyielding nature of the protagonist's attitude toward motherhood," and I would be all, "Uhh, I liked the bit with the dog. It was funny and sad at the same time, which is, you know, cool." Which is to say, these stories weren't fun to read. They were work, full of clever symbolism and literary styling, but not entertaining. And most of the time I felt like the stories were going right over my head, which is a pretty depressing reading experience.

There were a few stories I thought were okay, and one, "Vanishing Act," that I really liked a lot, but overall, I'll leave this one to the pretentious English majors.

This collection can be downloaded for free from the publisher's website [here](#).

Evgeny says

This is a collection of urban fantasy stories with weird twists - and I do mean weird. Think what would happen if David Lynch wrote some urban fantasy. Actually in the beginning I was almost sure it WAS David Lynch writing under a pseudonym, but later I realized this is just too weird for him.

As for the stories themselves, they range from horror to urban fantasy to fairy tales retelling - and all are as strange as they can be. A word of warning: if you think the first story is unusual (for the lack of a better word), at least there is some logic in there. The last stories defy all logic and break all traditional structure of storytelling.

I cannot say I like this book a lot, but I was sort of fascinated with it and I kept reading it just to see what kind of weirdness I will encounter next. The book is freely available from Goodreads - for now. Try and see if this is your thing.
