



Trash Sex Magic
by Jennifer Stevenson
by Audrey Niffenegger

from Post Road 10

Selected by Yael Goldstein Love, author of *Overture*, published in paperback as *The Passion of Tasha Darsky*.

Based on a stunningly unscientific survey of success-to-attempt ratios, I think the two most elusive writing skills are: 1. writing well about sex, and 2. doing justice to a good book without trying to slip in a little extra justice for yourself. Here's a #2 about a #1. – YGL.

Trash Sex Magic is one of those books that aren't easy to categorize or even describe, but here goes: it's a magic realist extravaganza about Raedawn Somershoe and her mother Gelia, who live with several other families in trailers along the Fox River, west of Chicago, and across the road from a gigantic tree/sex/nature god who happens to be their lover. One day developers show up to build townhouses. They cut down the tree and accidentally cause its sex energy to spill all over the place. Everyone gets a bit het up and nature goes berserk. Raedawn needs to find a man who's willing to become the new tree, and Alexander Caebeau, one of the construction workers, is the most likely

candidate. The book chronicles their sweetly weird courtship, as well as the sexual and romantic adventures of the other trailer denizens. The book teems with strangeness. Men become trees, little girls become foxes, the Fox River rises up, and fish abound. Here is Alexander, sitting in the construction site trailer, transforming:

. . . Down in the crawl space under the trailer, he could feel his toes already reaching for the mud. In a moment—he paused his frantic fretting to attend to just one toe, his whole mind aware of it dangling below in the crawl space, forking and reaching, reaching—in a moment it would touch the ground, and then—he shut his eyes while it happened—reaching—yes. There was water down there. His toe drank up water, and Alexander threw his head back at the thrill. Another hundred thousand gallons of this, please. No ice. His toes dove into the mud and spread, forking, drinking as they went. After a long breath in and out, Alexander opened his eyes. Here’s a pretty state of affairs. He struggled with the pleasure rising like floodwater in his body. Awkwardly he got to his feet, or his legs, or what his legs used to be—best not to look too closely—oh, lordy. What would Rae think?

Jennifer Stevenson fields a large cast of characters, all of them bound by family ties, old affairs, or real estate. The developers are clueless, and we hate them because they are sexually mean as well as land hungry. Perhaps the most unusual characters, and my favorites, are a pair of wild children, Mink and Ink. Though Mink is too little to cope with the sex energy spreading all around her, her struggles to resolve an itch she can’t scratch result in some of the novel’s most ingenious and surreal passages. Ms.

Stevenson’s prose is relaxed, funny, and lyrical. It’s not easy to write about sex without

being trite or ridiculous, but Ms. Stevenson manages to make her people dignified sex magicians, untutored practitioners of an art they cannot quite control. Like Louis De Bernieres' early books, *Trash Sex Magic* binds together the comedy of daily life and the magic inherent in nature. This is a damn fine read, and I wholeheartedly recommend it.

Audrey Niffenegger is a visual artist and writer. She lives in Chicago and teaches at the Columbia College Chicago Center for Book and Paper Arts. Her first novel, *The Time Traveler's Wife*, was published last year by MacAdam/Cage.