

Only Human: and Other Stories

Jude Collins

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Three years after publishing his first collection of short stories (*Booing the Bishop*, 1995), Collins' penetrating yet humorous look into human frailties and foibles is back. Each of these concisely written stories center upon a male character—and it is through them that we watch how different men deal with their own physical and emotional embarrassments and pain while under pressure from guilt, grief, passion or illness.

All of the stories reflect a quiet desperation in the men. Not able or not willing to express their feelings and needs, they suffer in silence, determined that certain events will work out a solution for them. When expectations fail to appear, however, the steps each man takes to resolve his particular plight leads to a less than satisfactory conclusion: ignored hemorrhoids result in nightmarish visits to the doctor; not coping well with divorce or death leads to mental breakdown; an inability to deal with drastic changes leads to suicide; and unfilled desires—in marriage or dating—result in feeling trapped or unfulfilled.

The situations themselves, if one were to experience them firsthand, would not be even close to amusing, but Collins' witty descriptions of the details involved lighten the atmosphere of the more serious stories and bring absolute hilarity to others. A wonderful look into the male psyche on several levels, Collins reveals the painful, absurd and sometimes funny way people handle stress. A highly entertaining collection that is sure to leave readers chuckling to themselves for days afterward.

NELLY HEITMAN (January / February 1999)

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