

## The King of Nothing Much

**Jesse Edward Johnson**

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A forty-something father copes with his changing circumstances, grappling with his role in his family and society, in Jesse Edward Johnson's literary novella *The King of Nothing Much*. This enjoyable novel blends everyday humor with a sad look at marriage and parenthood.

Straightforward on its surface, the novel focuses on Weldon, a stay-at-home dad whose oldest daughter trades family time in for time on social media and whose younger kids are getting to the point where they don't need him quite as much. After he accidentally hurts a young boy, Perry, at a birthday party, Weldon agrees to take the boy along with his family on their trip to a lakeside cabin.

Weldon winds up sympathizing with the young interloper, who is neglected and ignored by his wealthy father at home. But that's a minor surprise compared to everything else that Weldon faces on his family's trip.

Its footing firm in the tradition of modern suburban stories, the book focuses on Weldon as he tries to take stock of his life. His internal monologue is a constant and welcome presence, filling in backstory and imbuing his ordinary lake trip with the weight of his history at the site and with the future that he used to envision. Weldon's relationship with Perry puts his fatherly instincts into action, contrasting well with both of their family situations and setting up important internal family lessons: Weldon learns more about his wife and kids as the vacation continues.

Witty and concise, *The King of Nothing Much* is a compelling character study of a father whose story warrants consideration.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2020)

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