

at nine-thirty in the morning.

She wishes N dead, has sex with him, leaves him scathing voice-mail messages, tells him how desperately she misses him.

Through it all, she attempts to maintain a light mood and sense of normalcy for the toddler son she calls A, though she worries that “whatever s said [to him] ... there will be damage.” She busies herself with ordinary parenting activities—reading Dr. Seuss and molding Play-Doh and making macaroni and cheese—and delights in his presence. But when N comes to visit the child, she fails to hide her emotions:

I cry and make no sound, so A won't hear. But he does, in that scary way children have. He comes over and says, 'Mommy?'

'Mommy has a cold,' I say.

'I love you, Mommy.'

'I love you too,' I say.

'Let it go,' N hisses, seeing my wet face. Yes. But how?

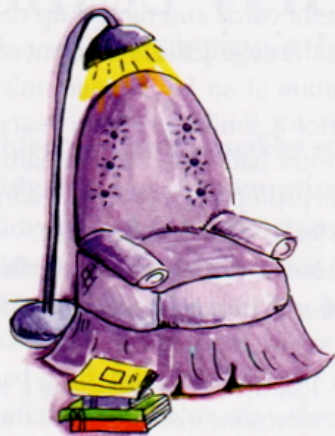
Reading *Split* is like dutifully listening to a girlfriend wail for days and lays over an ex you know is a jerk, until you want to shake her and say, “Get over it, already! He's not worth it!” Which is what Finnamore's actual friends occasionally hint, as well. “Doll, you have no idea how I have longed for this day,” Lisa says when he hears the news.

Like her prose, Finnamore's conversations with friends seem to revolve around almost nothing else but her own grief and anger. So it's not surprising when she tells one of them, “I've worn out everyone I know. I can't call anyone because they are all used.”

Without a girlfriend's obligations of loyalty, I felt a bit used myself, as I struggled through this outpouring of understandable but ultimately tiring misery.

the reading chair

books we like



Schuyler's Monster: A Father's Journey With His Wordless Daughter, by Robert Rummel-Hudson (St. Martin's Press, 2008).

When the instructor of the Lamaze class that Rummel-Hudson attended with his pregnant wife said, “So the first thing the nurse will do is hand the new baby to you, mommies, so you can count their little fingers and toes ...” Rummel-Hudson added, “And heads!” Weisenheimer moments like this pepper this making-of-a-father memoir and help lighten what could be a true tale of woe. Rummel-Hudson's daughter, Schuyler, was diagnosed at the age of three with polymicrogyria, a rare brain malformation that causes various developmental problems: the most frustrating, a lack of speech. Rummel-Hudson chronicles, with disarming frankness, the experience of parenting a child no one knows how to help. His own journey includes marital problems and fights with school administrators reluctant to work with Schuyler. His family's trials haven't extinguished Rummel-Hudson's smartass side, but they've drawn forth a tenderness that is touching and utterly familiar: “This love was daunting to me. It was the rest of my life, this love ... I was Schuyler's prisoner now, and it was in that captivity that I had achieved my life's joy.”

—Elizabeth Roca

Love You to Pieces: Creative Writers on Raising a Child with Special Needs, Suzanne Kamata, ed. (Beacon Press, 2008).

Being the parent of a special-needs child can be lonely, Kamata says in her introduction to this anthology of essays, poetry, and short fiction. Her own contribution, in fact, is an essay focusing on her feeling of isolation as the mother of a deaf child in Japan, her adopted country. There is loneliness, too, in living “with a person who does not communicate in the same way you do,” observes Clare Dunsford, whose son, born with Fragile X syndrome, speaks in abstract, poetic bursts. The children portrayed in these pieces have widely ranging disabilities, from autism to

the rare, joint-hardening condition of fibrodysplasia ossificans progressiva. The collection's arrangement, however, from the children's birth through adulthood, highlights the similarities in their parents' emotions and concerns, including shock at an infant's diagnosis and attempts to help an adult child live a satisfying life. There is pain in these pages, as in Penny Wolfson's contemplation of her son's Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which will cause his early death. But there is also Michael Bérubé's celebration of his teenaged son's feats of memory and comprehension, despite his Down syndrome. It's a reminder of life's changeability; surprises occur and parents persevere, even in seemingly fixed situations. —E.R.

Parenting, Inc.: How We Are Sold on \$800 Strollers, Fetal Education, Baby Sign Language, Sleeping Coaches, Toddler Couture, and Diaper Wipe Warmers—and What It Means for Our Children, by Pamela Paul (Times Books, 2008).

Paul examines trends that many contemporary American parents take for granted, tracing their origins and current appeal. Baby equipment, toddler entertainment, and parenting advisers all fall under her scrutiny. Paul sets claims from toy and video manufacturers, magazine editors, and other purveyors of baby and toddler goods against research from scientists and psychologists to show why many parenting “necessities” are at best unnecessary, and, at worst, restrictive of our children's developmental freedom and enjoyment. Nevertheless, these industries are booming, Paul says, due to a consumer culture that plays on parents' anxieties and ambitions for their little ones. While she often seems to address a fairly narrow audience—many families simply can't afford the \$800 strollers or exclusive baby classes of her subtitle—her claim that a trickle-down effect causes even lower-income families to overspend on children's items is convincing. Paul's sobering message is tempered by her conclusion, which contains a list of beneficial aspects of the parenting industry, but the book's real value lies in its call for parents to examine their child-related expenditures more closely. —E.R.