

A Regular Guy

By Mona Simpson

Anywhere But Here and The Lost Father have established Mona Simpson as one of our most accomplished writers. In her new novel--the portrait of a legendary, quintessentially American entrepreneur trapped by the age he helped to define--she brilliantly extends her achievement. More powerfully than ever before, Simpson uncovers the nature of longing and belonging, of blood relations and the human heart.

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editorial:

Amazon.com Review

Mona Simpson's first two novels, *Anywhere but Here* and *The Lost Father*, won her literary renown and a wide following. Now, in her third novel, the narrator Ann Atassi has been replaced by a third-person narrator recounting the adventures of young Jane di Natali, but the theme remains the same: the search for, and the attempt to understand, the absent father. This time the father is a millionaire biotechnology magnate named Tom Owens--loosely based, perhaps, on Steven Jobs, Mona Simpson's half-brother and the founder of Apple Computers. Fans of Simpson's previous novels will not be disappointed by this excursion into the cracked world of family relations.

From Publishers Weekly

A daughter obsessed with an estranged father, the governing theme of Simpson's uneven last novel, *The Lost Father*, becomes in her latest a springboard for a luminous family saga about the overreaching ambitions of a boyish Silicon Valley tycoon and his vexed relationship with an illegitimate, adolescent daughter. Echoes of the Book of Genesis resonate throughout the novel, lending it an enchanting, allegorical air without overwhelming the uneasy, acutely observed family chemistry that is its focal point. Tom Owens, a brilliantly imagined hybrid of Bill Gates and Jay Gatsby, is a Harvard dropout whose Midas-like good luck has turned Genesis, the biotech firm he launched in his parents basement, into a Fortune 500 company. At 30, having long since written off his provincial high-school girlfriend, Mary, and their daughter, Jane, Owens has become an unabashed philanderer and an aspirant to political office. At the novel's outset, Mary, who gave birth to Jane in a rustic commune in Gray Star, Ore., and whose nomadic and flaky approach to mothering is a Simpson hallmark, teaches her 10-year-old daughter to drive and sends her over the Sierra mountains in a rusty truck to live with Owens in Alta. A fictitious North California university town, Alta is part of a paradisaic landscape of rolling fruit orchards, flower and herb gardens and lush, suburban lawns. There, Moses-like, Jane is discovered asleep in the backyard of Owens's overgrown mansion by his friend Noah Kaskie, an academic scientist stricken at birth with a condition called Osteogenesis Imperfecta and confined to a wheelchair. Reluctant to accept the half-feral, precocious Jane as his own, Owens summons Mary to Alta and surreptitiously installs them in a bungalow. Jane has inherited from Owens "a quality of beseechment so imperative that everywhere she and her mother lived, a small circle of people formed around

them, each one believing it was her or his responsibility to help this one child on her way." As Owens gradually grants Jane a larger role in his life, she pulls together a dysfunctional, ad-hoc family of her own, including Owens's longtime girlfriend, Olivia, as well as Noah and Mary. In Simpson's creation myth, the fruit of the tree of knowledge is money. As Noah's genetic research is contrasted with the business of trademarking and selling proteins at Genesis, Owens comes into sharp focus as a Northern Pacific entrepreneurial everyman, speaking a language of callow boosterism ("New York's over, Noah... The center of the country's here, now") and unable to relate to his family and friends except through gifts and transactions carried out by an accountant. A centerpiece of the novel is his 30th-birthday party, a lavish Gatsbyan affair to which Jane and Mary aren't invited. When Exodus, Owens's bold new initiative at Genesis, fails, he is abruptly ousted by the company's new president. In the novel's bittersweet coda, however, it's clear that Owens's exile from Genesis and Jane's simultaneous rejection of her hippyish mother's mountain heritage are what allow them to come together as father and daughter. Ultimately it is Simpson's delicate grasp of family planning and misplanning, of legitimate versus illegitimate parenting and the machinations of creativity and selling-out that make this rich and winding story so mesmerizing.

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From Library Journal

Simpson spins yet another yarn featuring a borderline incompetent mother (Mary) and her independent, reflective daughter (Jane) in the tableau of her first novel, *Anywhere but Here* (LJ 3/15/87). Mary sends nine-year-old Jane off alone to find her father, Tom Owens, a young, self-made multimillionaire whose biotechnology company, Genesis, is the focus of his life. As Tom comes to accept Jane, he tries to divorce her in his mind from Mary. Also on the stage is Tom's friend, Noah Kaskie, a paraplegic biologist whose will to be a great scientist is eclipsed by his simple desire to be touched, to be loved. The reversal of fortune that affects Noah and Tom provides a subtext in the time-honored tradition of "just-comings." But Simpson draws her character so precisely that Tom is not a simple stand-in for hubris, Noah for honor, and Mary for indulgence. Reading *A Regular Guy*, then, is not a matter of playing favorites but of witnessing destiny arc across a range of interconnected lives. Though this beautifully written novel lacks some of the humor of Simpson's earlier work, the fully realized characters and the well-cast mood of ambivalence make this her best novel yet. Highly recommended.

-?Adam Mazmanian, "*Library Journal*"

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