



So It Won't Go Away

John Lent

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The gluttonous, jazz-loving character of Neil Connelly in John Lent's *So It Won't Go Away* can never get enough out of life, no matter how much he over-indulges his desires: "Drinking, smoking, sex: a man's hands twittering, eyes bugged out in a desperate longing to be held, fondled, stuffed, stroked. Guzzling and inhaling things in a big grab against death." At the same time, John Lent can't get enough of Neil Connelly and his two siblings, Jane and Rick. Nine years ago he introduced this trio in *Monet's Garden*. Time has not been kind to the Connells. In Lent's seventh book, the middle-aged and childless Connells are all ex-alcoholics struggling with feelings of inadequacy and depression. They have survived their alcoholic father but it's not clear if they will survive themselves--and their disturbing similarities to one another. All three find it hard to be intimate. All have addictive personalities. All have a keen interest in modern art and literature. All three are writers who teach about writing. Neil Connelly loves jazz and Lent is himself a singer/songwriter for an Okanagan jazz trio. Neil and Rick teach at the same university where John Lent teaches much the same courses. If that last paragraph sets off an amber light of caution, well, you're only human. Philip Roth aside, most fiction writers who can only write about writers (ie., themselves) are sorely lacking imagination. But in John Lent's defence, he's had time to refine his style and hone in on what's important to him. The short stories in *So It Won't Go Away* are not plot-driven narratives. Instead they flip around in time, place and point of view, incorporating first, second and third-person perspectives. Lent's dozen stories get as close to three-dimensional writing as is possible. Sometimes the reader is taken into a character's mind as a child, sometimes she/he is addressed directly. Other times Lent interjects directly, positioning his characters like a conductor. Frequently the act of creation itself is explored, be it music, art or literature. Cumulatively, this collection is more than a series of literary experiments and musings. It's like John Lent is circling his narrative, studying it from all angles. Each story connects to others. Along the way we learn about Jane's inability to find a permanent partner. We learn about Rick's long-term marriage to a woman battling lupus. We learn about Neil's break-up with his wife and his own subsequent breakdown. It's not cut-and-dried. Instead it's all jumbled together, like a family that messily combines past and present and future at the dinner table. Along the way, Colette, the 71-year-old mother of the three Connells, maintains her own balancing act: "...it was a matter of two landscapes: the one they were driving through, and another one, of words and names and instructions, that became a second version of the one they were driving through—a landscape of language and facts and details which she would store away and pull out whenever she needed it—one that was, in some ways, the most important landscape, the most real." Her three children come together in an idyllic village in France at the end, and their deep affection for one another could well be the remedy they need to help resolve their problems. The narrator muses, hopefully: "Was there another way of seeing it so you could fall into it, embrace it...gobbled up by an equally voracious God?" Meanwhile, there's nothing wrong with filling your lungs with spring air, devouring a tarte flambé, slurping down a good scotch, jamming jazz into your ear or fitting your body to another's in an act of love. If the shoe fits, write it."—Cherie Thiessen

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