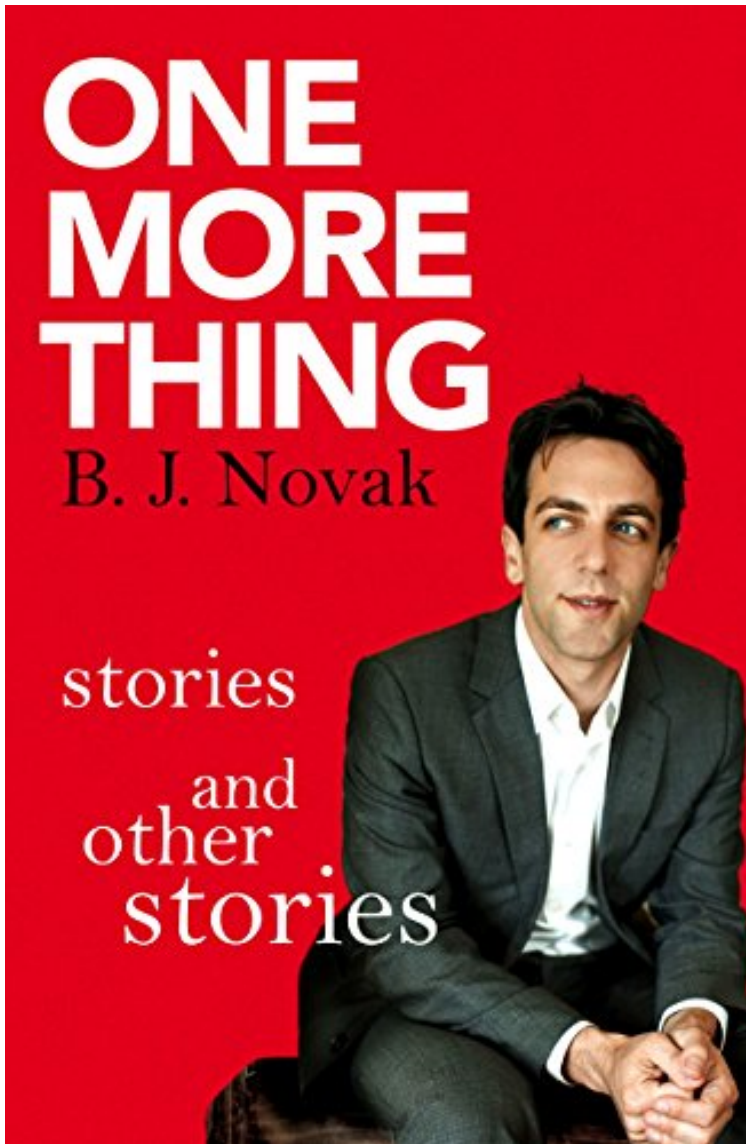


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One More Thing: Stories and Other Stories (English Edition)



Par B. J. Novak
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[PDF] One More Thing: Stories and Other Stories (English Edition)

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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA boy wins \$100,000 in a box of Frosted Flakes - only to discover that claiming the winnings may unravel his family. An acclaimed ambulance driver seeks the courage to follow his heart and throw it all away to be a singer-songwriter. A school principal unveils a bold plan to permanently abolish arithmetic. A new arrival in heaven, overwhelmed by infinite options, procrastinates over his long-ago promise to visit his grandmother. We meet a vengeance-minded hare. We learn why wearing a red T-shirt is the key to finding love; how February got its name; and why the stock market is sometimes just . . .

down. Finding inspiration in questions from the nature of perfection to the icing on carrot cake, from the deeply familiar to the intoxicatingly imaginative, ONE MORE THING finds its heart in the most human of phenomena: love, fear, family, ambition, and the inner stirring for the one elusive element that might make a person complete. The stories in this collection are like nothing else, but they have one thing in common: they share the playful humour, deep heart, inquisitive mind, and altogether electrifying spirit of a writer with a fierce devotion to the entertainment of the reader.

Excerpted from the Hardcover edition Chapter 1

No One Goes to Heaven to See Dan Fogelberg

Tim, nine years old, leaned next to his grandmother as she lay in her hospital bed. He gently kissed her face around the tubes in her nose. I love you, Nana, said Tim. I promise I'll visit you in heaven. The next day, Tims grandmother died. Sixty-six years after that, Tim died. The first thing Tim did when he got to heaven was look for his wife. He was so anxious and excited to find her that he couldnt focus on anything else not the fact that he had died, not the fact that he was in heaven, and certainly not his grandmother. Is Lynn here? he asked everyone he met. Yes, they said, but he kept asking. Is Lynn here? Yes, they laughed, you'll see her in like two seconds! And there she was, standing beside a park bench in a spring dress, looking at the same time the way she looked when he had known her last, at the hour of her death just under a year ago, and the way she looked at her very most beautiful, the day he married her, when she was twenty-two and he was twenty-five. It was a far deeper and sharper moment of first love than the first first moment of first love, because now, not only was he falling in love, but he was falling in love with someone he loved; and while the first time, he also believed hed be with her forever, he was too young to consider what forever meant. Now here he was, truly, on the first day of forever. He kissed her for an eternity, which was fine, because heaven had eternities to burn. Then he kissed her for another. It wouldnt have been heaven without you. He took her hand in his, and they strolled out of the park together. Oh, and you gotta remind me, said Tim as they walked. One of these days I have to visit my grandma. Remind me, okay? Of course! said Lynn. I would love to meet her. But first, they looked up their friends, the ones they had shared for the main length of their life together. They brought to each house a bottle of wine that never emptied, and they visited everyone for hours, laughing late into the night, reminiscing and gossiping about who had died and who hadnt. Then theyd wake up early the next morning, make coffee and French toast, and talk about the friends they had visited and whether or not heaven had changed them. Next they went to see Tims parents, who were doing very well and were very happy to see both of them. Have you visited Nana yet? asked his parents. Not yet, said Tim, but soon. Next, they visited Lynns mother. You know your fathers here, Lynns mother told Lynn. Lynn was surprised to hear this. It would be the right thing to visit him. Tim had never met Lynns father, but he had heard all about their relationship. Her father abandoned her family when she was thirteen and only saw her once more, when he showed up unannounced at her high school graduation and tried to reconcile, ruining the day for her. She had retaliated by rebuffing him publicly and rudely. She did not want to see him at all, but she could tell it was the right thing to do, and heaven was the kind of place that made you want to do the right thing. Well go together, said Tim. Itll be fine. Lynns father opened the door to his oversized condominium with a huge grin. Of course he would have a condominium in heaven. Remember at your high school graduation? he said. When you told me to go to hell? He smiled like he had been looking forward to saying that line for a long time. What a jerk, she said after they left. Why did they let him in? He must have changed, said Tim. And then changed back? Maybe, said Tim. Who knows how things work here? Well, maybe this is better, because I get to feel mercy, or something. Or close that chapter. Or whatever. I did it. You know? Thats a good attitude, said Tim. And it was the right thing to do. Now you can enjoy heaven with a clear conscience. The next day, Tim called Nana. Hello? Nana? Whos this? Nana! Its Tim! Tim who? Tim Donahue! Elizas husband? Oh. She sounded unhappy. Hi. No, Tim Junior. Elizas son. Timmy! Your grandson! Timmy! Oh, goodness Timmy, you died? Youre just a little boy! No, Nana, Im all grown up! Im in my seventies now. Was. Oh, thank goodness. I still pictured you as a little boy! How did everything wind up? Well . . . theres a lot to cover, Nana! We want to come visit you. I have a wife now! I want you to meet her! Oh, thats wonderful! Wonderful. It will be so wonderful to see you both! Whens good? said Tim. When? Oh. Hm. Nana paused. I have a bunch of stuff next week. Im seeing some friends, and theres a couple concerts I want to see . . . How about next weekend? The weekend after this coming weekend, I mean. We would love that. How about Sunday, for dinner? Like old times? Huh? Like the Sunday dinners you used to make us, when we were kids. Oh. Sure, we could do that. Or we could order in. Lot of options. Lets decide closer to then, okay? Okay, Nana. I love you. Im so happy Im going to get to see you! Me, too. I love you, too. See you next Sunday. But not this one the next one. Bye now. Nana sounded odd, Tim said after he hung up. Or something. Maybe shes upset that you didnt get in touch with her before? I

dont know, said Tim. Its hard to tell that stuff over the phone. And also, theres a lot to do here, you know? I hadnt seen you, I hadnt explored heaven its not like anyones going anywhere . . . Itll all be better on Sunday, said Lynn. When we see her. Youre right, Tim agreed. On Sunday, Tim called to confirm. Nana! Its Tim. Just confirming well see you tonight? Im bringing my wife, Lynn. Who? Lynn, my wife. Youre going to love her. Whos this? Tim, your grandson. Timmy. Timmy! Oh, Tim, gosh, tonight? Im so sorry, tonight wont work. Can we do next weekend? Sure, said Tim. I guess. Let me look here. . . . Theres something I have to be at on Saturday. And then Im actually checking out some shows next week actually, is two weeks okay? A week from next Friday? Can you pencil that in? Sure, said Tim. Perfect. Ill see you next Friday! A week from, I mean. Okay, Nana. I love you. I love you, too! A week from Friday, Tim and Lynn showed up at the door of Nanas house. On the door there was a note: Tim: Tried to call you last minute but no one picked up. So sorry but theres a concert I just had to see with some friends. Wont be back till very late. So sorry. Must reschedule. Talk soon. I love you! Nana Tim turned to Lynn. Am I crazy to take this a little personally, at this point? This is weird, Lynn agreed. A concert? Again? Werent you two close? I thought so. Maybe youre right maybe she is mad that I didnt contact her before. But then why wouldnt she just say it? I dont know. I guess she would have. Well, what should we do tonight? asked Lynn, trying on a smile and finding it fit perfectly. Were all dressed up, its a Friday night in heaven . . . Yeah. We can go out ourselves, cant we? Want to check out one of those concerts? Sure! said Tim. Why should Nana have all the fun? Tim and Lynn walked through the streets of heaven at sunset. A breeze blew through the pink-and-purple air. Dogs barked, birds sang. Children with old souls finally laughed lightly. Horses, bicycles, and vintage convertible cars shared the wide streets. As Tim and Lynn got closer to the center of town, they started walking past posters: tonight! bo diddley! free! tonight! bing crosby! free! tonight! nikolai rimsky-korsakov! free! Look at this! said Lynn. No wonder your nanas out at concerts every night. Ritchie Valens! The Big Bopper! Curtis Mayfield! Sid Vicious?! Debussy! Is this all really free? asked Lynn. Roy Orbison! Tim pointed to a sign. Want to check this one out? It was transcendent: a private concert and an arena show at the same time. None of the things that had kept them away from live-music events before had made it into heaven. No sweat or aggression in their row. No songs from the new album that the musician was overly sincere about now but would be embarrassed by in a few years. No confusion or pressure as to whether they should sit or stand or dance or put their hands in the air. The sound was impeccable. So was the stage design. They could eat, drink, smoke, make out. They had front-row seats. There were no crowds. They were literally the only people there. After a few hits, but still at the height of the show, Tim turned to Lynn with an indulgent idea. Wanna just check out the next one? he said. Why not? They went to the stadium next door. It was also a private concert in a giant arena. Just as they walked in, John Denver launched into a blasting rendition of Take Me Home, Country Roads. When he finished, Tim and Lynn gave a standing ovation. Hello, Heaven! This is amazing, remarked Tim. I know! Its almost even too perfect, said Lynn. Like, in a way, I would like it if there were a few people here, a little energy, you know? That could be the motto for heaven, said Tim. Almost too perfect. They snuck out to see the next show. As they kept walking toward the center of the music and arts district, the streets became more and more crowded. They started seeing more of all types of people, occasionally even celebrities. For example, Ricardo Montalban. He was an actor they both recognized from the television show Fantasy Island, but he wasnt being mobbed at all. He almost looked like he wished he would be, or that at least someone would approach him to ask him a question or to pose for a picture. Tim wondered why no one was going up to talk to him and then, to try to figure it out, asked himself the same question why wasnt he approaching Ricardo Montalban? Probably because there were more interesting things in heaven than Ricardo Montalban. It must be hard being Ricardo Montalban in heaven, thought Tim. As they got within a half mile of the center of the district, Tim and Lynn finally realized why the concerts had been so empty before. Look, whispered Lynn. Look. elvis presley! live! free! wolfgang amadeus mozart! live! free! i. v. beethoven! live! free! Tim and Lynn stared in awe as people poured by the millions into stadiums bigger than they could have imagined to see the greatest artists not only of their generation but of their entire generations consciousness. Hundreds of thousands of people lined up to see Miles Davis; millions to see Tupac Shakur; billions to see Michael Jackson. We can see anyone, remarked Tim to Lynn. We can see anyone, of all time. It was almost too much to comprehend. It was a good thing they were already used to love, or they might have fainted from the size of the feeling. They decided on Frank Sinatra, a favorite of both of theirs, and headed into his concert. It couldnt have been any more of a thrill. Sinatra was at the top of his game. He opened with The Best Is Yet to Come, and a crowd of seven hundred million chanted along. Then a song they had never heard before a new one, Sinatra warned, making everyone nervous but it was as good as one of the classics,

and they had heard it first. Then My Way. Then Fly Me to the Moon. Then New York, New York. Then One for My Baby. Now, here are a few songs whose artists haven't made their way to heaven yet, intoned Sinatra in the same soothing, ever-knowing voice he had in life, made even more poignant here, as he stroked the quaintly unnecessary cord of his microphone. I hope they won't mind me giving you a little preview, keeping the songs warm for them. And then Tim and Lynn took in the soul-expanding sight of Frank Sinatra covering the hits of Bruce Springsteen, Radiohead, Coldplay, and Beyoncé. Heaven cared not for the limits of era. After five hours and nineteen encores full of more of his own hits, the concert finally drew to a close.

Tim kissed Lynn, and she kissed him back. They felt like they were in heaven. They were, of course; but they felt like it, too. Still, even after all that, they didn't want the show to end, and when they looked down, they realized what was hanging around their necks: backstage passes, all access, VIP. Of course, said Lynn. Of course we have these. They went backstage. They showed the badges tentatively to the first person they saw in a uniform, who nodded respectfully and walked them to a wide, clean corridor under the stadium. It was a billion-seat stadium, so the hallway was long, but along the way, not a single person second-guessed their right to be there. Tim and Lynn were escorted along the hallway until they were finally left by themselves outside a single, unmarked door. Tim and Lynn looked at each other. Could it be this easy? asked Lynn. It's heaven, Tim said. No need to guard the door. Tim knocked, but heard nothing. He knocked again, harder, and heard nothing. He tried the knob of the door and found it was unlocked of course and swung open easily. And there, leaning casually against a closet door with his eyes half-closed, was Frank Sinatra. And there, on the floor on her knees, was Nana, blowing Frank Sinatra. You got to understand something, Timmy, said Nana, glowing and gorgeous and angry and mysterious as she closed her robe with one hand and the door to Sinatra's dressing room behind her with the other. And it's lovely to meet you . . . ? Lynn. Lynn. Tim, Lynn, I'm so happy for you both. And I love you, Timmy, so much. But you have to understand. When I met you, everybody was dead. My husband; two of my kids; my parents, of course; my sister; all of my friends not everybody, but, yeah, kind of everybody, you know? And I was part dead from it. I didn't know I was at the time. And believe me I was so happy and grateful for the love I did have in my life, in the form of you and your little sister, whose name escapes me at the moment. Danielle! That was her name, wasn't it? My, what a beauty. Nana smiled at the memory. She was my . . . I loved you all equally, all so much. That love was real. And it still is. And Lynn, welcome to the family. She hugged Tim again and kissed Lynn on the cheek. Oh, isn't it exciting? Everyone's here. There's so much going on! *Revue de presse* "It isn't easy to make a reader laugh out loud. Even when confronted with the sharpest, funniest prose, many people will respond with nothing more than a quiet chuckle. . . . Whatever the reason, all I can say is good luck chuckling quietly during *One More Thing*, the wonderfully cockeyed, consistently hilarious debut from B.J. Novak. . . . Given his background in TV comedy writing as well as stand-up, it's not surprising that Novak knows how to stick a great line or milk a funny premise with the right amount of squeeze. What's more striking is the wild imagination he brings to these pages, taking familiar narrative constructs a woman and a man on a blind date and infusing them with the unexpected. . . . His style is part Steven Wright and part Charlie Kaufman, married with a sharp ear for (and satire of) contemporary pop culture. . . . A gifted observer of the human condition and a very funny writer capable of winning that rare thing: unselfconscious, insuppressible laughter.--Jen Chaney, *The Washington Post* In one of the longer entries in his very funny debut collection of stories, B. J. Novak describes a writer and translator named J. C. Audetat, who has a gift for the off-the-cuff vernacular of his day or what might be called the poetry of everyday conversations. . . . The same might be said of Mr. Novak, whose athletic imagination and ear for the language of his own time and place (that is, the vernacular of that 21st-century genus of young, hip Americans, known to frequent urban habitats on the East and West Coasts) are showcased in this volume. . . . Mr. Novak has an idiosyncratic voice that's distinctively his own, though *One More Thing* will also produce lots of comparisons to other writers. His more fully developed stories have a sense of the absurdities and sadnesses of contemporary American life reminiscent of George Saunders's short fiction. Others will more likely elicit comparisons to David Sedaris's books (without the curmudgeonly persona), Steve Martin's prose pieces (with less conceptual strangeness) and Woody Allen's *Without Feathers* and *Side Effects* (with less emphasis on big, existential questions). . . . Mr. Novak is nimble at showing how easily the ordinary can morph into the extraordinary and adept at making us see the surreal in the everyday. . . . A funny writer with a great ear, but also as a genuine storyteller with an observant eye and finely tuned emotional radar. Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times* B.J. Novak meets--no, exceeds--expectations in *ONE MORE THING*, firmly establishing him as one of the best humor writers around. . . . The varied length of the stories adds to

the pleasure--it's like sampling a multicourse meal instead of gorging just on pizza. . . . Novak's writing mirrors his acting in that both rely on dry wit and dead-pan delivery. His influences run from celebrated New Yorker humorist James Thurber to Steve Martin to the Harvard Lampoon style of comedy (no wonder, as Novak was a member of the publication in college) to stand-up comedian Steven Wright. But he synthesizes those influences and has delivered something wholly original. . . . The longer stories avoid easy laugh-out-loud punch lines in favor of quirky, offbeat twists that showcase his skill as a storyteller. . . . Novak has found success as an actor, screenwriter and producer, but it turns out that the one more thing he added to his rsum--author--might be where his greatest talent lies. Andy Lewis, The Hollywood Reporter Novak's high-concept, hilarious, and disarmingly commiserative fiction debut stems from his stand-up performances and his Emmy Award-winning work on the comedy series, The Office. . . . Accordingly, his more concise stories come across as brainy comedy bits, while his sustained tales covertly encompass deep emotional and psychological dimensions. An adept zeitgeist miner, Novak excels at topsy-turvy improvisations on a dizzying array of subjects, from Aesop's fables to tabloid Elvis to our oracular enthrallment to the stock market. . . . Writing with zing and humor in the spirit of Woody Allen and Steve Martin, Novak also ventures into the realm of George Saunders and David Foster Wallace. . . . Baseline clever and fresh, at best spectacularly perceptive, and always commanding, Novak's ingeniously ambushing stories of longing, fear, pretension, and confusion reveal the quintessential absurdities and transcendent beauty of our catches-catch-can lives. Booklist, starred review Novak's debut contains a buckshot 64 fun and funny short stories crammed into a single volume. Part Etgar Keret, part McSweeney's, these tidy tales from the alum of TV's The Office depart from the how I became famous comedians biography for a decidedly more literary turn. . . . The bulk of Novak's stories are comedic, and more than a few are surprisingly tender. . . . Written by an author in complete control of his craft. Publishers Weekly "Everyone knew that B.J. Novak was smart and sexy, but funny, too!? Wow, screw that guy. I haven't laughed at words this hard since I read." Joshua Ferris author of The Unnamed and Then We Came to the End "ONE MORE THING is a funny and inventive debut collection, infused with a deadpan absurdist wit reminiscent of Woody Allen and Ian Frazier. B.J. Novak's stories are sly and playful, but they can pack a real emotional wallop." Tom Perrotta, author of Nine Inches "I am so relieved that I had not read B.J.'s book before I worked with him. I would just have spent every day at his feet instead of doing my job." Emma Thompson "Dark and hilarious, like the fudge Grandma used to make during her 'special' period. Deliciously funny!" Jack Handey, author of Deep Thoughts and The Stench of Honolulu "B.J. blew me away. He just keeps kicking short fiction in the rear, making it run ahead clutching its ass, and then he runs up and kicks it some more, and the result is one of the most aggressively, insanely awesome debuts in a while." Gary Shteyngart, author of Super Sad True Love Story