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## SCARY OLD SEX

by Arlene Heyman

“Unflinchingly candid . . . Heyman has been described as [Bernard] Malamud's muse. Judging from these stories, he may have been hers as well. The stories in this keenly observed collection lay bare truths—some comforting, others uncomfortable—about love and sex, aging and acceptance.” —*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“What an astonishing collection! I absolutely loved these stories, so stylish, earthy, and funny—and underneath them, thrumming away, a sense of our own mortality. They've been haunting me ever since I read them.” —  
**Deborah Moggach**, author of *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*

Arlene Heyman's **SCARY OLD SEX** (Bloomsbury / on sale: **March 8, 2016 / \$26 hardcover / ISBN 978-1-63286-233-4 / 240 pages**), would be a dramatic debut collection coming from anyone. What makes this collection even more notable is that it is written by a practicing Manhattan psychiatrist/psychoanalyst in her seventies. Heyman, the recipient of Fulbright, Woodrow Wilson, Rockefeller, and Robert Wood Johnson fellowships, has crafted these no-holds-barred stories about intimacy and married love and extra-marital affairs over many years.

Heyman worked on her writing as an undergraduate at Bennington College, where she studied with Bernard Malamud, with whom she went on to have a lifelong friendship. She earned an M.F.A. at Syracuse University, publishing short stories, teaching literature. But Heyman's life changed dramatically when she shifted gears and went to medical school to become a psychiatrist and then a psychoanalyst. Throughout the years, she continued to write fiction while seeing patients and raising her sons.

The stories: In these pages you will meet Marianne, in her sixties, who makes love with her second husband, in his seventies, while painfully recalling her first husband who died young; she is also worrying about her son, who is getting divorced; and, all the while, she is enjoying vivid sexual fantasies. There is nineteen-year-old Leda, a budding artist who begins an affair with a married, middle-aged, world-famous artist; she is besotted with him and also envious of him; he feels she has restored his youth to him, and he also feels he needs his balls examined for having fallen in love with a child. Dr. Dan Dorenbusch, ob-

gyn, gets a call in the middle of the night to drive to a house in New Jersey, where his father lies dead in his mistress's bed; Dan had no idea; and he is doubly bereft. Lottie Hart Levinson, bench scientist, is in a rage at having her paper on rat salivary glands rejected by a prestigious journal; she spends a hot August running her work through all over again, killing rats now this way, now that while dealing with her rambunctious young sons from her current marriage, her husband's angry teenaged daughter, her own about-to-start-college-aged daughter from her previous marriage; in the end, she does harm where she least means to. Solly, a sixteen-year-old Stuyvesant High School student, sits in calculus class fantasizing about a classmate's breasts and worrying about his father lying in hospital, as outside the window the Twin Towers begin to fall. In the pages of **SCARY OLD SEX** life is thick and intense and chaotic; and hard-working characters break taboos as they try to live fully.

With this stunning debut collection **SCARY OLD SEX**, Heyman gives us--with gravitas and humor--raw, unsettling, even alarming stories.



### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Arlene Heyman** has been published in the *New American Review* and other journals, won *Epoch* magazine's novella contest, and has been listed twice in the honor rolls of *The Best American Short Stories*. Heyman is a psychiatrist/psychoanalyst practicing in New York City, where she lives with her husband. She is currently at work on a novel.

### **PRAISE FOR SCARY OLD SEX**

"These brave and brilliant stories will take you deep into the lives of women, often older women, who have no fear of flying, who dare to explore the other side of the mountain, and who are well-acquainted with connection and loss, with sexual passion and romantic love. Arlene Heyman looks [at], and does not look away [from], ...what we think, do, hate, regret, and wish for in our secret hearts and our most private moments. Gutsy and unsentimental, she introduces you to some unforgettable characters--and also, perhaps, to some unexplored parts of yourself." —**Judith Viorst**, author of *Necessary Losses*

" 'Old age is not for sissies', as the formidable Bette Davis once observed, so the reader who is both old and squeamish is best advised to have a strong drink before embarking on 'At the Happy Isles' [the third story in the collection **SCARY OLD SEX**], which is set in an 'assisted-living home' in northern New Jersey. The 68-year-old Marilyn is visiting her limitlessly ungrateful mother Gussie, who is 99. Gussie wears a 'powder-blue, polyester pantsuit' and although she has two...[hearing] aids she has trouble hearing what her daughter is saying... 'At the Happy Isles' ought to leave one dispirited, for it recounts in detail the horrors of incontinence, when a single fart can cause hours of unhappiness, but Arlene Heyman is possessed of a comic authority that never falters, never sneers. *Scary Old Sex* constitutes a joyful, joyous debut." —**Paul Bailey**, *The Literary Review*

"I suppose it's not surprising that [Heyman's] stories are so perceptive and unflinching given her profession, but she also writes with such verve and kindness about her characters and their sex lives - their fears, phobias and muddles - that you can't help but smile - and sometimes laugh out loud at what they get up to (she touches many a nerve). If you've passed your half century you'll recognize something

of yourself in some of these tales, and if you have yet to reach that age you should read them and be warned - or encouraged - or both." --**Mavis Cheek**, author of *Amenable Women*

"Struggling to balance a living with a passion, many writers wonder: what if life gets in the way? For Arlene Heyman, whose debut collection of short stories *Scary Old Sex* drops in March, writing was sidelined for years by her family and job. (Though she had a promising start as author Bernard Malamud's student--and lover.) But Heyman kept working on the stories she'd begun as a twentysomething for the next thirty years. The result is a searing, provocative collection of stories that have had the rare chance to mature along with their author...." --**Leah Falk**, *Jewniverse.com*

"Short stories about people enjoying carnal pleasures might not scandalize many twentieth-century readers. But Heyman's honest...tales about elderly and physically imperfect people, their wrinkly bodies up against one another, are certain to shock many, especially the under-30 set... Heyman, a distinguished psychiatrist-psychoanalyst, goes even further into the realities of old age, portraying two senior participants who must consider such things as acid reflux and erectile dysfunction pills in order to perfectly time a romantic rendezvous. She also addresses the universal reluctance to even think about parents having sex... Not all of Heyman's frank stories are totally sexual; some are sad, some amusing, but all are poignant and all widen our view of what it means to be human." — **Donna Chavez**, *Booklist*

'Both funny and eye-wateringly explicit' **Joan Bakewell**, *Independent*

This sensual and sometimes shocking collection understands and explores how people's lives are complicated by sex ... The author is a practising psychiatrist and writes with such intimacy and precision that she frequently makes you feel like a trespasser in the bedroom' *Daily Mail*

'These earthy, eye-opening and authentic tales tell uncomfortable truths ... Though her characters' flaws, fears and phobias feel all too real, Heyman's treatment of them is honest, human and kind' *Daily Telegraph*

'She pays such sustained and stylish attention to late-life lovemaking, that you may feel you are reading about it for the first time ... Mature and soulful ... Heyman's earthiest and most sustained and impressive writing finds its center of gravity at crotch level ... Rueful and funny and observant... Heyman's stories are seriously sexy; they generate a lot of heat. Read them in public and you might be seen blushing.... One of the takeaways from *Scary Old Sex* is that old sex isn't so scary at all. These men and women are busily and blissfully humanizing themselves, the kind of bliss that lifts right off the page.'

**Dwight Garner**, *New York Times*

'Lusty, tough and life-affirming ... Graphic, funny, tender and shocking ... *Scary Old Sex* has a lot more literary history and mystery going for it than most first-time collections' **Elaine Showalter**, *Guardian*

'Hits the reader in the psyche, the gut and the groin with the force of a precision-aimed slingshot ... Bracing, brilliant. ... Her unflinching eye is trained on the failings of the aging human body and the surprising tenacity of its desires ... What is most refreshing about these stories is that they turn the world of Philip Roth, John Updike and Woody Allen on their head ... Her spare, sharp prose reminds me of two masters of the genre: Tessa Hadley and James Salter. Like Hadley, she is marvellous at capturing the terrifying capacity of even the kindest women to feel dissatisfied with the men in their lives \*\*\*\*\*'

**Rowan Pelling**, *Sunday Telegraph*

‘So perceptive and unflinching ... She writes with such verve and kindness about her characters and their sex lives – their fears, phobias and muddles – that you can’t help but smile’ **Mavis Cheek**

‘Her stories are measured and sober, but they break taboos ... Bodies long past their best attempt feats of flexibility described with the exactitude of an anatomist and the compassion of a well-trained shrink. It’s Heyman’s sensitivity to the tragicomic potential of the situation which makes her prose so extraordinary’  
*Spectator*

‘Her earthy dramas of sex, romance and ageing are full of beady-eyed truths’ *Mail on Sunday*

‘There are shades of Philip Roth in psychiatrist Arlene Heyman’s graphic scenes; she has an unapologetic, unflinching approach to sex and bodies, which somehow makes her stories all the more life-affirming ... Laugh-out-loud funny. Bold, frank and wise, this is a confident, memorable read’ *Big Issue*

‘Delivers a shock of taboo desire that is lusciously sensual. All the stories overturn conventional notions around aging ... Heyman’s cautionary tales are wonderfully anti-prudish.... Bittersweet tales of OAP sexuality, told with warmth and honesty ... Wryly comic ... Her cool, clipped, spare writing is objective, dispassionate’ **Michèle Roberts, Independent**

‘Strike to the bone of loving relationships – and to their flesh as well ... Enthralling, and reassuring ... Arlene Heyman is not only a gifted story-teller; she is also a doctor and psychoanalyst’ **Irma Kurtz, Jewish Chronicle**

‘Perceptive and earthy ... The style is direct and often witty, with analysis’s insight into human behaviour constant throughout ... Moving’ *Irish Times*

‘Arlene Heyman’s frank tales of conjugal relations among the old feel paradoxically taboo on the page, all the more so for the fierce candor with which they examine the sexuality of older women ... The world is awash in convincingly graphic sex scenes. Heyman is the rare writer who puts hers in the service of convincing love stories’ **Alexandra Schwartz, New Yorker**