

Every Other Weekend

Margaret Klaw

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A neighborhood's golden couple divorces in Every Other Weekend, a novel with keen insights into community relationships.

In Margaret Klaw's novel *Every Other Weekend*, a Philadelphia couple's divorce has rippling consequences in their progressive neighborhood.

Jake and Lisa share a home in Greenwood, a chic enclave where private schools host potlucks and fair-trade-coffee runs are commonplace. He's a forty-something hipster who plays in a band and holds an ordinary job. She's the higher earner who'd hoped that he'd aspire to more. When Lisa initiates their divorce, Jake is taken off guard. They have misread each other, and it seems that everyone around them has a stake in what happens next.

Incorporating the perspectives of the couple's children; the judge in their divorce; Jake's lawyer, Ellen, and Ellen's teenage daughter, Marni; and Jake's bandmates, the novel reveals Greenwood's pretensions, secrets, and polyamorous relationships through people's impressions of the beautiful couple's disintegrating marriage. As the novel moves from the divorce, which at first seemed uncomplicated, into a later custody battle, its sense of suspense builds: something has broken down in the onetime couple's communications. The neighborhood gossips express self-satisfaction, veiled concern, and some thrill that Jake is available.

Jake's voice is centered, but he is also somewhat unreliable. Though he is in pain, he's quick to adapt to his new circumstances. He is a loving father, but as a husband he is not self-reflective enough, even about why Lisa has chosen to leave him. He leaves favorable impressions on others, in part because of how well he dresses; their opinions of him also evolve over time. Jake's own admissions reveal that he can be petulant, immature, and inconsiderate of boundaries (his natural affection toward his young daughter tilts into admiring her looks, for example).

In contrast, Lisa's viewpoints are seldom centered. Indeed, apart from her early thoughts about Jake's lack of promise, less is known about her than about her husband. When she does chime in, it's to show how they grew apart via small but fascinating details. She makes note of the little allowances that people make for one other and that they later come to resent, as with Jake's thoughtless spending.

The novel explores marriage and family through the secondary characters' lives too. For Ellen, Marni's college admissions process makes her feel like an empty nester. Jake's younger new girlfriend, who is still married herself, lectures him about being open-minded in relationships. And polyamory complicates some lives too. Still, these plotlines end up muddling the novel's ideas about the kinds of love people forge to feel secure. As conflicts mount surrounding how Jake's behavior is affecting his children, the court's decision approaches, bringing with it a tidy resolution.

In the contemporary novel *Every Other Weekend*, a divorced couple faces the steady fallout of their choices, working toward a truce.

KAREN RIGBY (March 22, 2023)

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