



The First Bad Man: A Novel

By Miranda July

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The instant *New York Times* bestseller is “astonishing...In one novel, Miranda July tells us more about our universal need to be loved, and our ability to love and be loved, than most earthbound authors will in a lifetime” (*Vanity Fair*).

In *The First Bad Man*, Miranda July tells the story of Cheryl, a vulnerable, uptight woman in her early forties who lives alone, with a perpetual lump in her throat, unable to cry. Cheryl is haunted by a baby boy she met when she was six; she also believes she has a profound connection with Phillip, a philandering board member at Open Palm, the women’s self-defense studio where she has worked for twenty years.

When Cheryl’s bosses ask if their twenty-one-year-old daughter Clee can move into her house for a little while, Cheryl’s eccentrically ordered world explodes. And yet it is Clee—the selfish, cruel blond bombshell—who teaches Cheryl what it means to love and be loved and, inadvertently, provides the solace of a lifetime.

“Brilliant, hilarious, irreverent, piercing—*The First Bad Man* powers past sexual boundaries and gender identification into the surprising galaxy of primal connection” (*O, The Oprah Magazine*).

This is a spectacularly original, unsettling, accomplished, and moving first novel with a tender and beguiling happy ending.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

An Amazon Best Book of the Month, January 2015: Cheryl Glickman is an employee at a self-defense nonprofit, an ironic profession once you get to know her. She lives alone, pickling in her eccentricities, and obsesses over a douchey co-worker with designs on much younger prey. If anyone needs the sense knocked into her, it is Cheryl, and lo and behold, an unwelcome and most unsanitary houseguest just might (literally) be up to the task. As Cheryl is taken outside of her comfort zone, you may be as well when reading Miranda July's hilariously irreverent and oddly romantic novel, *The First Bad Man*. There are some outlandishly crude moments that belie what ends up being an achingly tender treatise on love and motherhood. It is a testament to July's skill as a storyteller that she is able to make you laugh, cringe, and cry from one page to the next, and not only sympathize with a very unlikely heroine, but actually relate to her. Let your freak flags fly and enjoy. —*Erin Kodicsek*

Review

"Miranda July's ability to pervert norms while embracing what makes us normal is astounding. Writing in the first person with the frank, odd lilt of an utterly truthful character, she will make you laugh, cringe and recognize yourself in a woman you never planned to be. By the time July tackles motherhood, the book has become a bible. Never has a novel spoken so deeply to my sexuality, my spirituality, my secret self. I know I am not alone." (Lena Dunham, author of *Not That Kind of Girl*)

"With *The First Bad Man*, Miranda July provides an audaciously original, often hilarious map of the ever-expanding reach of unhinged imagination in America. With IMAX-scale emotional projections, a post-gay regimen of sexual fantasies, and a cast of riveting misfits worthy of Kurt Vonnegut, July takes us on a picaresque journey in which the heroine's ultimate challenge turns out to be a stunningly ordinary circumstance more transfixing than all the virtual caprices a 21st-century mind can muster." (Andrew Solomon, author of *The Noonday Demon* and *Far from the Tree*)

"Miranda July has created in her stories and here in her amazing debut novel something close to a new literary genre. If science fiction speculates on new technologies in human life, July imagines new emotions that have never been described. Anger is erotic. Pleasure feels like fear. Sex dynamites everything around it. And yet we can't stop having it. Not since David Foster Wallace has a writer so hilariously captured the wince-worthy adventures of the awkward human beings we all pretend we aren't." (Mark Costello, author of *Big If*)

"Miranda July's exciting and wild novel *The First Bad Man* begins deeply, absurdly funny, gets increasingly twisted and strange, and then ends quietly, urgently heartfelt. It is a novel about aging, about motherhood, about sex, about weird wounded women--yes--but it is really a novel about the desperate possibility in all of us to love and be loved. *The First Bad Man* is like no other novel you will read this year (or any other year)." (Dana Spiotta, author of *Eat the Document* and *Stone Arabia*)

"Cheryl Glickman, Miranda July's heroine in this unforgettable novel, is one of the most original, most confounding and strangely sympathetic characters in recent fiction. She narrates this very intimate epic of a story -- a story that starts in a place of brittle, quirky, loneliness and progresses into a profoundly moving story of nontraditional love and commitment. This novel is almost impossible to put down, and confirms July

as a novelist of the first order." (Dave Eggers, author of *The Circle*)

"The 'yes, that's really the way it is!' moments in this book came so fast and furious that I found myself page-turningly propelled into a story that, despite its subtly off-kilter course, somehow — I don't know how — ended up revealing the invisible and depthless emotional reality that roils and tugs beneath us all. Miranda July's protagonist inhabits this uncharted world of unspeakable desires, embarrassing hopes and shifting conquests more fully than any in contemporary fiction I can recall, and you will inhabit it right along with her. You will also inhabit her. And she, you. *The First Bad Man* is a strange miracle of a book, and despite the opinion of its main character, a truly great American love story for our time." (Chris Ware, author of *Building Stories*)

"July's work reminds us that the essential storytelling tool is voice. Hers is smart, funny, twisted, vulnerable, humane, and reassuring: a dazzling human consciousness speaking frankly and fondly and directly to you. If I ever start to doubt the power of language and intelligence, I only have to read a few lines of July to have my faith restored." (George Saunders, author of *Tenth of December*)

"Miranda July's first novel announces something new, not only in its invention, characterization, and pace, but emotional truth. With it, the esteemed artist and filmmaker joins the front rank of young American novelists—and then surpasses them." (Hilton Als, author of *White Girls*)

"I am in awe of Miranda July. She is the person I want to be, the artist who feels free to work in any number of media, the artist who is so talented, expressive. *The First Bad Man* is a book that must be read, a book that must be purchased – in duplicate – one for you, one for a friend. Don't think you can loan this book – you'll never get it back." (A. M. Homes, author of *May We Be Forgiven*)

"July is brilliant, hilarious, irreverent, piercing—even cringe-inducing, powering past sexual boundaries and gender identification into the surprising galaxy of primal connection. 'We all think we might be terrible people. But we only reveal this before we ask someone to love us. It is a kind of undressing.' Is there a more hopeful statement about humankind? In Miranda July's strange universe, probably not." (*Jayne Anne Phillips, O, The Oprah Magazine*)

"Lovelywriting is interspersed with outer-space levels of strange...yet gradually thiscatalog of the grotesque builds into something beautiful, and this deeply oddbook abruptly becomes transcendent. It feels like being on a plane when ittakes off—all that rattling, speed, and oil, and then suddenly:airborne." (*Molly Langmuir, Elle*)

"July's work seems to grow deeperand more endearing with each iteration, while retaining its hysterical-neuroticcharms and crisp, colloquial wit. July's first novel is a test of her range,which she ably passes. Single, middle-aged Cheryl Glickman expands from a collection of oddities — a baby obsession, a hallucinated ball in her throat,bizarre sexual fantasies — into someone with real longings, relationships, andopportunities for genuine growth and redemption." (*New York Magazine*)

"*The First Bad Man* isa disorienting mash-up of tongue-in-cheek social commentary, a celebration ofoddball anti-heroines, and an embarrassingly honest look at the obsessions andentitlements we all (subconsciously or not) carry with us. I found myselflaughing and cringing in equal measure, and even if I don't *totally* understandeverything July is trying to say or do here, I've become a believer." (*Bustle*)

"Very funny... The novel exploded my expectations and became unlikeanything I've ever read...hilarious...like many of us, July seems to haveunbridled daydreams. Unlike most of us, she has

wicked follow-through...July is exceptional at tracing the imaginative contours of sexuality... She is not after perfection: She loves the raw edges of emotion, she likes people and things to be a little worn. Life isn't silky, July is saying. The snags and the snafus bring the joy...*The First Bad Man* makes for a wry, smart companion on any day. It's warm, it has a heartbeat and a pulse. This is a book that is painfully alive." (Lauren Groff, *The New York Times Book Review*)

"The first novel by the filmmaker and artist Miranda July is like one of those strange mythological creatures that are part one thing, part another — a griffin or a chimera, perhaps, or a sphinx... An immensely moving portrait of motherhood and what it means to take care of a child...July writes of Cheryl's discovery of maternal love with heartfelt emotion and power." (Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*)

"Miranda July — filmmaker, performance artist and now novelist — is ready to leave the old Miranda July behind. You know the one: The curly haired gamin, her impossibly blue eyes swirling with ideas. The irrepressible creative blowing cinematic kisses to the world...*The First Bad Man* is about to complicate the picture. Striking and sexually bold, it reveals a side that is darker and that, truth be told, has lurked in her work all along... Though *The First Bad Man* actively challenges a reader's comfort zone, July creates a female neurotic archetype that's familiar and fresh at once." (Margaret Wappler, *Los Angeles Times*)

"*The First Bad Man* is the first great book of 2015... July's work is tied together by her singular, confident, multifaceted voice. Her characters are often unusual and under-confident; her writing is always the former and never the latter. *The First Bad Man*, July's debut novel, tells the story of an outwardly boring person whose interior life is a mosaic of delightful neuroses and staggering self-doubt... beautifully worded, emotionally complex, impressively but quietly insightful, and, in the right light, so, so funny." (Josh Modell, *The AV Club*)

"Miranda July's novel is a brilliant document of our age of managed sharing... *The First Bad Man* is a brave undertaking for July, and not just because it finds her committing to long-form storytelling without a visual element for the first time. It incorporates a boldly feminist recasting of familiar tropes and genres... Though this is her first novel, July is an accomplished writer of short fiction, and within *The First Bad Man* live a handful of perfectly drawn short stories... July has an enviable talent for sketching inner life as all-consuming... Within the context of the wider world—in which all speech is policed, but especially women's stories about their uniquely feminine personal experiences—*The First Bad Man* feels visionary... Few have Miranda July's... particular talent for couching what feel like naked, universal truths in clouds of the imagined and the impossible." (Karina Longworth, *Slate*)

"Risky fiction: hilarious, dark, uncomfortable, and so accurate in mapping the way fantasies can overtake life that it's also one of the most honest character studies I've read in a long time... when pregnancy and an infant are introduced in the second half of the book, imagination and fantasy life are replaced with very real anguish, protection, and love." (Christopher Bollen, *Interview*)

"July suffuses her narrative with compassion... *The First Bad Man* is a terrific novel... an off-kilter, extremely smart meditation on sex, love, loneliness, and the demands of work and womanhood... engrossing, surprising, and emotionally true." (Eugenia Williamson, *the Boston Globe*)

"Love comes in a dizzying number of shapes and sizes, Miranda July demonstrates in her stunning first novel... July is a brilliant stylist, and better yet, she's funny... darkly comic, astonishing... this book couldn't be better." (Kit Reed, *The Miami Herald*)

"*The First Bad Man* proves July's extraordinary adeptness at yet another art form... by the novel's lovely,

blissfully hopeful conclusion, she and Cheryl... earn our unexpected affection.” (*Cliff Froehlich, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch*)

“If you were searching around for a representative creative artist for the middle of the 21st century’s second decade, you could do a lot worse than 40-year-old Miranda July. She’s an actress, a filmmaker, a performance artist, a conceptual artist, an APP, a short story writer and now, finally with this book, a novelist... she is a fresh, feminist, groundbreaking, creative sensibility who should probably be treated in entirety, if at all... Love, perverse if not polymorphous, is the basic subject here, although other subjects include everything from self-defense to lactation. Her literary voice is lively enough to be compulsive here.” (*Jeff Simon, The Buffalo News*)

“A downright delight... July has arranged all her characters on the stage, and we can guess their trajectories. After initial clashes, Clee and Cheryl will form an unlikely, yet mutually rewarding friendship, possibly over a drunken karaoke session. Through this friendship, Cheryl will learn to open her heart, let down her guard, and, hey, maybe touch up her hair and start shaving her legs... The subversive brilliance of July’s novel is that while it has the breezy verve of the sort of chummy novel where all of the above happens, none of it actually does. Cheryl is transformed by love, yes, but not in the way almost every other novel, film, and memoir about a single, early-middle-aged woman tells us she must be in order to function as a viable heroine. There is a sneaky feminist agenda at work here, all the more effective because it’s smuggled into a weird, hilarious, compulsively readable anti-romantic comedy. Like Clee, the book is a time bomb in a velour tracksuit.” (*Jennie Yabroff, The Daily Beast*)

“Compelling... will delight the open-minded reader looking for something new. It will satisfy July’s fans and win her many more.” (*Library Journal (starred review)*)

“Delightful... Ms July, a director, screenwriter and artist, has managed to craft not only a beguilingly odd and unpretentious narrator, but also tell a wise and surprising love story... Ms July’s writing playfully mixes extraordinary ingredients with ordinary concerns and the effect is often amusing and insightful. This is not the work of a dilettante, but a strong follow-up to her acclaimed short stories that came out in 2007. Fiction will never claim Ms July’s undivided attention, but with luck there will be more where this came from.” (*The Economist*)

THE KANSAS CITY STAR

“I have no compunction in predicting (in January, no less) that *The First Bad Man* will be one of the best books of 2015... Each new development — chromotherapy, unplanned pregnancy, love sprung from ‘cowlike vacuousness’ — feels like a literary sucker punch, one so calculated and well-placed that we can’t help, while bowled over, but admire July’s left hook... July’s emotional insights are as unassuming as they are universal... *The First Bad Man* is worth it for the sheer pleasure of discovering a fresh story and a vibrant, original voice. Readers may find the novel as seductive as Cheryl finds love: ‘It just feels good all over,’ she gasps. ‘It’s like wearing something beautiful and eating something delicious at the same time, all the time.’” (*Liz Cook, The Kansas City Star*)

“Steeped in hyperbole, humor, wry commentary and strange characters... a masterful setup for a poignant nucleus on the matter of motherhood. The birth of Clee’s son... adds even greater humanity and dimension to the young woman’s outlook than her lovingly dependent bond with Cheryl has. As for Cheryl herself, her lifelong yearning to love a child and be loved by the child in return is finally fulfilled... heartbreakingly beautiful... exquisite... a singularly rich anthem to maternal love. (*David Wiegand, The San Francisco Chronicle*)

“This surreal novel blurs reality and imagination through the voice of Cheryl Glickman, the manager of a company that sells self-defense videos as a fitness aid. Cheryl works from home and lives alone, eating at her sink with a single utensil and dish—part of a “system” so refined that, she notes with pleasure, “after days and days alone it gets silky to the point where I can’t even feel myself anymore, it’s as if I don’t exist.” The arrival of a guest disrupts her life, bringing violence and eroticism. July has perfected the art of the compellingly uncomfortable scene, and though the technique perhaps suits short fiction better than a novel, she succeeds in making Cheryl both achingly familiar and repulsively alien.” (*New Yorker*)

“We don’t always know what intimate life consists of until novels tell us...a powerful mother-son love story...[the ending] leaves one thrillingly breathless...one realizes only then that one has been waiting the whole time for this very thing. And so one welcomes the multitalented Miranda July to the land of novel-writing...No one belongs here more than she.” (*Lorrie Moore, The New York Review of Books*)

“*The First Bad Man* has time to unfold like an origami fortune-teller, revealing emotional landscapes that are satisfyingly complex, if slightly wrinkled...darker and more delicious than anything you’d expect.” (*Amy Gentry, The Chicago Tribune*)

“Hilarious and poignant...fascinating and unsettling...In Cheryl’s world, we find the kind of resonance that reverberates long after the book is closed.” (*Karen Sandstrom, The Cleveland Plain-Dealer*)

About the Author

Miranda July is a filmmaker, writer, and artist. Her stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Paris Review*, and *Harper’s*. The story collection *No One Belongs Here More Than You* won the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Award and has been published in twenty-three countries. She wrote, directed, and starred in *The Future*. Her film, *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, received a special jury prize at the Sundance Film Festival and the Caméra d’Or at Cannes. In 2014 she debuted the audience-participatory performance, *New Society*, at the Walker Art Center, and launched the messaging service app, *Somebody*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Victor Shepard:

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Luther Ritenour:

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Dina Hirsch:

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