



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
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***“When the moon fully blocked the sun, the darkness seemed something between dusk and night...In that cindery pall, the facade of the moon cold and white, I could believe we were watching the end of the world.”***

-From Dominic Smith's  
*The Beautiful Miscellaneous*

A recent bout of the flu gave me a chance to use my few waking hours to read and to rewatch one of my favorite DVDs. The combination of the two - and the emotional state I find myself in when I am ill - made me think about the feeling I get when I am experiencing excellence. I tried to come up with a description of that emotion and the closest I could come was truth.

*The Beautiful Miscellaneous* had been highly recommended by one of my fellow librarians. “I thought of you,” he told me, “because the writing is so good. And,” he added, “it’s about a physicist, like your dad.” I dutifully checked it out and placed it in that pile of books I sincerely mean to read some day.

Usually what happens to those books is they come due, I renew them, they come due again, I renew them for a last time, and then I return them, unread. They fall into the category of the almost-read, a category that seems to hold a

great number of titles. These are similar to the almost-watched, an even larger group. I haven’t actually given up on the idea that I eventually will read or view any of these. Their time will come - just not now.

Fortunately, Smith’s book was still in the second renewal stage and so there it was, available at the same time I realized I’d read every one of the new children’s books I had brought home. I was ill, trapped at home and bookless. Well, not really, since I own hundreds of books. But of the ones I hadn’t read or reread, nothing looked interesting.

I alternated reading this book with watching (for the second time) the first season of the Canadian series *Slings and Arrows* - one of my very favorites. It is about a repertory theatre called The New Burbage and it gives a realistic portrayal of theatre life. That may be one of the reasons I like it so much, since I grew up with a mother who acted and directed in a local theatre company. In fact, I

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spent a great deal of my childhood backstage, onstage, giving cues or watching rehearsals. The stage actors in *Slings and Arrows* are so true-to-life, it is enough to make you "both LAUGH and CRY" as the *Chicago Tribune* has said about them. In addition, the acting is perfect – it is honest and deep and, well, true.

And the book is, as Richard said, beautifully written. On the front flap, it says it is about "the average son of a genius," but of course, there is much more. There are great changes in his life after a nearly fatal accident, and he meets some fascinating and quirky characters, on his journey to find out more about himself and his role in the world.

But what stands out about this novel is the writing. It, too, is honest and deep and true. It is unpredictable and yet

safe, because you know as you read it that Smith is taking care of his readers by giving them his introspection, his good ear for language and his love of story.

It is books like his and programs like *Slings and Arrows* that help me remember why my daily life involves bringing people and words together. Whether they are spoken or written, when done beautifully they provide inspiration for us all.

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