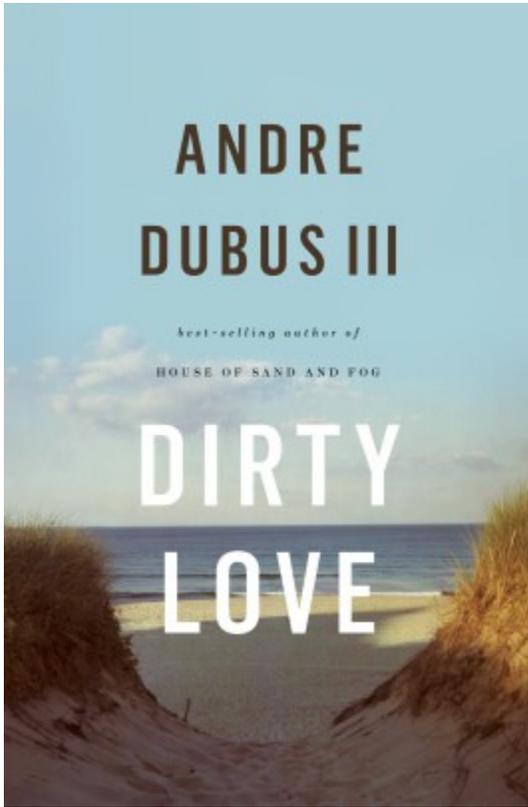


Review: Andrew Dubus' collection of novellas explores the quest for love



W. W. Norton/Associated Press - This book cover image released by W. W. Norton shows “Dirty Love,” by Andre Dubus III.

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“Dirty Love” (W.W. Norton & Co.), by Andre Dubus III

The latest release from Andre Dubus III is more satisfying than a collection of short stories but a bit less satisfying than a novel. His publisher calls “Dirty Love” a collection of novellas and they’re fabulous. Tenuously tied together by common characters, the longest stories are the bookends. “Listen Carefully as our Options Have Changed,” the opening story, explores an unhappy marriage and two cheating spouses. And in the last, “Dirty Love,” a teenage girl tries to escape the notoriety of appearing in a sex video that goes viral.

Depressing? Of course. At times, gritty? Definitely. And, yes, there’s a lot of sex. But if you enjoy Dubus, you’ll enjoy “Dirty Love” because his writing is as gorgeous as ever. And his insight into damaged relationships and real people begging for love is spot on.

In “Marla,” the main character complains about her live-in boyfriend’s playing video games: “Marla felt the same bruised emptiness that she did after an action movie, and she’d kiss Dennis on the forehead and leave the room while he kept playing.”

Or Devon, the humiliated girl who chooses to live with her uncle because her parents can’t get past their anger about the sex tape, when she finds love: “Francis has seen it over and over again, the girl in the corner whose new radiance shines not from the boy who has found her but from the chance to direct all the love that’s been pooling inside her and now it’s a warm flowing stream.”

“Dirty Love” will remind you that everyone’s searching, but not everyone finds love.

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