

JAMI ATTENBERG is the author of *Saint Mazie*; *The Middlesteins*, which was a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Prize for Fiction and was published in nine countries; a story collection, *Instant Love*; and the novels *The Kept Man* and *The Melting Season*. She has written for *The New York Times* and numerous other publications. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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"Is all life junk—sparkly and seductive and devastating—just waiting to be told correctly by someone who will hold our hand and walk with us a while confirming that what we're living is true. This is a good proud urban book, a sad and specific blast for the fearless to read. Thank you, Jami." Eileen Myles, author of *Chelsea Girls*

"Attenberg writes with a scalpel, and has presented one of the finest, and most unexpected, character studies you're likely to read all year." Tanya Sweeney, *Irish Independent*

"Deeply perceptive and dryly hilarious, Attenberg's latest novel follows Andrea Bern: on the cusp of forty, single, child-free by choice, and reasonably content, she's living a life that still, even now, bucks societal conventions . . . Structured as a series of addictive vignettes—they fly by if you let them, though they deserve to be savoured—the novel is a study not only of Andrea, but of her entire ecosystem . . . Wry, sharp, and profoundly kind; a necessary pleasure." *Kirkus Reviews* (Starred)

"Andrea's story is stinging, sweet, and remarkably fleshed out in relatively few pages. Attenberg follows her best-selling family novel, *The Middlesteins* (2012) with a creative, vivid tableau of one woman's whole life, which almost can't help but be a comment on all the things women ought to be and to want, which Attenberg conveys with immense, aching charm." *Booklist* (Starred)

"Jami Attenberg's sharply drawn protagonist, Andrea, has such a riveting, propulsive voice that *All Grown Up* is hard to put down, but I urge you to resist reading it in one sitting. Both the prose and the author's knowing excavation of one woman's desires, compromises, strengths and fears deserve closer attention. Like Andrea herself, this novel is beautiful and brutal, intelligent and funny, frank and sexy." Cynthia D'Aprix McSweeney, author of *New York Times* bestselling *The Nest*

"What a voice. Honest and hilarious, unflinching and unapologetic, Jami Attenberg writes what it is to be single, sexual, and child-free by choice. I read the first page and knew the novelist was going to outdo herself. I am happy to report that she most certainly did." Helen Ellis, author of *American Housewife*

"Jami Attenberg has written her frankest, funniest and most riveting and heartbreaking book yet. In *Andrea*, she has created a character women will be talking about for years." Emily Gould, author of *Friendship*

"Andrea, thirty-nine, is totally single. No kids, no men, nothing keeping her from living her life to its full potential, which she does . . . Told in vignettes, *All Grown Up* asks what happens after you've got the whole 'adult' thing under control." *Glamour*, "Best Books to Read in 2017"

ALL GROWN UP

JAMI
ATTENBERG



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THE APARTMENT

You're in art school, you hate it, you drop out, you move to New York City. For most people, moving to New York City is a gesture of ambition. But for you, it signifies failure, because you grew up there, so it just means you're moving back home after you couldn't make it in the world. Spiritually, it's a reverse commute.

For a while you live downtown with your brother and his girlfriend, in a small spare room, your bed jammed between shoe racks and a few of your brother's guitars in cases plus a wall of books from his girlfriend's undergraduate days at Brown. You get a job, via same girlfriend. You don't hate the job and you don't love the job, but you can't sniff at a hard day's work because you are no better than anyone else, and, in some ways, you are much, much worse. You acknowledge your privilege, and you get to work.

You start making money. You find a small, dusty, crumbling loft in a shitty waterfront neighborhood in Brooklyn. It has one floor-to-ceiling window, a tiny Empire State Building in the distance framed beautifully within it. Now you are home. Everyone in your life breathes easier. She's safe now, they all think. At no point does anyone say to you, "So you've stopped making art?" It is because they don't want to know the answer or they don't care or they are scared to ask you because you scare them. Whatever the case, everyone is complicit in this, this new, non-art-making phase of your life. Even though it was the thing you loved most in the world.

But you have a little secret: while you are not making Art anymore you are at least drawing every day. To tell anyone about this would be admitting there is a hole in your life, and you'd rather not say that out loud, except in therapy. But there you are, once a day, drawing the same thing over and over: that goddamned Empire State Building. You get up every morning (or afternoon, on the weekends, depending on the hangover), have a cup of coffee, sit at the card table near the window, and draw it, usually in pencil. If you have time, you'll ink it. Sometimes, if you are running late for work, you do it at night instead, and then you add color to the sketches, to reflect the building's ever-changing lights. Sometimes you draw just the building and sometimes you draw the buildings around it and sometimes you draw the sky and sometimes you draw the bridge in

the foreground and sometimes you draw the East River and sometimes you draw the window frame around the whole scene. You have sketchbooks full of these drawings. You could draw the same thing forever, you realize. *No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river, and he's not the same man* is a thing you read once. The Empire State Building is your river. And you don't have to leave your apartment to step in it. Art feels safe for you again, even though you know you are not getting any better at it, that the work you are making could be sold to tourists on a sidewalk outside of Central Park on a sunny Saturday and that's about it. There's no challenge to it, no message, just your view, on repeat. But this is all you can do, this is all you have to offer, and it is just enough to make you feel special.

You do this for six years. Brooklyn apartment in a changing neighborhood, why move when the rent is so cheap? Mediocre but well-paying job at which you excel; you receive a few small promotions. Volunteer work here and there. You march where your activist mother tells you to march. Pointless sketchbooks pile up on the bottom row of a bookshelf. Barely scratching a feverish itch. You also drink plenty and for a long time use, too, coke and ecstasy mainly, although sometimes pills to bring you down at the end of the night. Another way to scratch the itch. There are men also, in your bed, in your world, foggily, but you are less interested in them than in muffling the voice in your head that says you are doing absolutely nothing with your

life, that you are a child, that the accoutrements of adulthood are bullshit, they don't mean a goddamn thing, and you are trapped between one place and another and you always will be unless something forces you to change. And also, you miss making art.

Other people you know seem to change quite easily. They have no problem at all with succeeding at their careers and buying apartments and moving to other cities and falling in love and getting married and hyphenating their names and adopting rescue cats and, finally, having children, and then documenting all of this meticulously on the internet. Really, it appears to be effortless on their part. Their lives are constructed like buildings, each precious but totally unsurprising block stacked before your eyes.

Your favorite thing is when a friend asks to meet you for a drink, a friend you have had a million drinks with in your life, and then, when you get to the bar, your friend stares at the menu and orders nothing, and you are forced to say, "Aren't you drinking?" and she says, "I wish," and she pauses dramatically and you know exactly what's coming next: she's about to tell you she's pregnant. And there is this subtext that you are lucky because you can still drink, and she's unlucky because she can't drink, she has this dumb baby in her. What a stupid fucking baby. In her.

Eventually your brother and his wife get pregnant, and you can't hate on that because it's family, and also they've always been incredibly kind to you, your brother and you

particularly bonded because of your father's young demise, an overdose. You throw a baby shower, at which you drink too many mimosas and cry in the bathroom, but you are pretty sure no one notices. It's not that you want a baby, or want to get married, or any of it. It's not your bag. You just feel tired for some reason. Tired of the world. Tired of trying to fit in where you don't. You go home that night and draw the Empire State Building and you feel hopeful doing this thing you love to do, so hopeful you look up online what tonight's colors mean—the lights are green and blue—and find out it's in honor of National Eating Disorders Day and you get depressed all over again even though you've never had an eating disorder in your life.

Nine months come and go, a baby could be born at any minute. You call your brother to find out when exactly, but they've been using a hippie-dippie midwife and he says, "We don't know yet. Could be another week." You are suddenly aswirl with enthusiasm. It's going to be a girl. "Call me whenever you hear anything, anything at all," you tell him. Then you have three intensely dull, soul-deadening afternoon meetings in a row and after that you are moved to a new cube, which you must share with a freshly hired coworker who is thirteen years younger than you and is hilarious and loud and pretty and is probably making half of what you make but still spends it all on tight dresses. It is a Friday. You go out for drinks in your neighborhood. You get lit. Then you call your dealer, whom you haven't called in a

few years. You can't believe the number still works. He says, "It's been a while since we last met." You say, "I've been busy," as if you need to justify why you're not doing drugs anymore. You don't buy that much, just enough, but then you meet a man at the bar—you both pretend you've met before although you haven't, but it just feels safer that way for some reason—and he has more than enough for the two of you. Then you go home together, to your place, to tiny Manhattan in the window, to the piles of sketchbooks, and the two of you proceed to do all the drugs. This goes on for hours. There's a little bit of sex involved but neither one of you is that interested in each other. Drug buddies, that's about it. You can't even get it up to get it up. Eventually he leaves, and you turn off your phone and go to sleep. You wake up on Sunday night. You turn on your phone. There are eight messages from your brother and your mother. You have missed your niece being born.

You don't do any drugs after that, ever again. No rehab necessary. You start to see the world with fresh eyes. But the world looks the same. Job, apartment, friends, family, view. For a few weeks it seems like they might try to give you an enormous promotion at work, but then you realize you'll have more responsibility so you wiggle your way out of it. This promotion would mean you're staying there for a while. You lie to yourself: I should keep my options open. You never know what could happen.

Still you draw. This is the best part of your day. This is your purest moment. This is when the breath leaves your body and you feel like you are hovering slightly above the ground. On New Year's, that day of fresh starts, you allow yourself to flip through some of the old sketchbooks. You recognize you have gotten better. You are not *not* talented. That is a thing that fills you up. You sit with it. You sit with yourself. You allow yourself that pleasure of liking yourself. What if this is enough?

A week later, you are leaving your apartment building and you notice a fence around the lot across the street. There is a sign up, a construction permit. A ten-story condo building. Starts in a month. You live on the fifth floor. This building will block your view, no question. For a second you wonder if this is a joke. You look behind you to see if there's a camera filming you, waiting for your reaction, but no, it's real, your life is about to change. At last, something surprises you.

It takes a year for the building to go up, and you watch the construction every day. Brick by brick. You can't tell when it will be finished exactly, when you'll finally lose the view, but you decide to throw one last party to signify the end. You invite everyone you know and you even allow children to come. Your friends toast the Empire State Building, and you. "It was a good view," says one of your old work friends, her fiancé in tow. "It wasn't a million-

dollar view," you say, "but it was worth fifteen hundred a month." "You have such a good deal," says her fiancé. "You can't move, even without the view. You can never leave this apartment," he says and shakes your shoulders.

The day the final brick is cemented and your view is officially gone, you buy a bottle of wine and order a pizza and sit at your table. You stare at air and nothing and brick. The thing that made you special is gone. You will never have that view back, nor that time. And all you have to show for it are these sketchbooks, which are useless anyway. You think about burning them, but what good would that do? And they're the only things that prove you existed on this earth. You realize all along you were just trying to prove to yourself you were still alive. *But if I don't have this, am I dead?* Surely not. Please, no. You take a bite of your pizza and a sip of your wine and ask yourself the question you're finally ready to ask: What next?