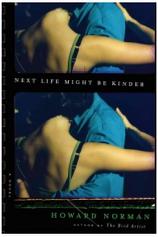


Next Life Might Be Kinder



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"It must be a good book," my husband said as I read by flashlight in the car on the way home from our Thanksgiving holiday.

What not to like: a spirit talking from beyond the grave, two writers practicing (or not) their craft, Lindy Hop lessons, a blue cat warming itself by the radio, birdwatching by the sea, and crocks and crocks of fresh fish chowder?

This novel takes place in Halifax and in a small village in Nova Scotia. The seaside village setting is spectacular with its wild Atlantic coast, historic graveyard, and old library.

The book tells the stories of two writers Sam Lattimore and his new wife, Lizzie. It's the 1970s and they live in a Halifax hotel where they also had their honeymoon. Lizzie orders a chaise-longue for their living room in honor of the topic of her dissertation, *The Victorian Chaise-Longue*, a minor book by a minor writer that Lizzie has chosen for what it teaches about life.

The couple share the first bliss of their married life, stealing time from their work for dance lessons. All is perfect except for the obnoxious bellman, Alfonse Padgett, who also takes Lindy Hop lessons and makes a pass for Lizzie who angrily tells him off.

However, Alfonse is more than creepy, he is dangerous. One day he invades their rooms with his key and slashes apart their favorite piece of furniture. Another day, he accosts Lizzie in the elevator. The hotel detective takes up the case, but can't get the hotel owner to make Alfonse give up his master key. Instead the detective bruises his knuckles with some old-fashioned persuasion.

Yes, the worst happens. Lizzie comes to an unfortunate end on the hotel stairway. But is it really her end? If so, why does she appear on the beach each night with eleven books by Sam's home in a remote village where he has retreated to after her funeral?

Considering the dark topics, this novel is amazingly light and funny. Particularly humorous are Sam's therapy sessions with Dr. Nissensen, a psychoanalyst, who tries to help Sam through his grief. But it's hard for Sam to grieve when his wife returns nightly.

This book is perfect for these dark winter nights. You can almost smell Sam's fish chowder, the one recipe he makes over and over for his friends, Cynthia and Philip. Meet them and a whole cast of other interesting characters in this emotional read.

If you like Norman's style, try his earlier book, *The Bird Artist*. It's set on the remote Newfoundland coast and features a revenge-murder.

Posted by Dory L. on December 2, 2015

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