



A Fine How Do You Do

Patty Dickson

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This light and readable novel is full of eccentric and charming characters.

A Fine How Do You Do by Patty Dickson follows a devoted husband of forty years as he abandons his Pennsylvania hometown and takes up residence in a quaint, though lively, English town. Containing a wide cast of characters and several unexpected plot twists, the book is a comical read.

The book opens with Eric Sanders, a weatherman from Altoona, packing his single small suitcase for England. He is without a place to stay or any idea of where to go. Luckily, Eric runs into a wealthy socialite, Alma Boeld, who takes a liking to him and invites him to stay with her.

It is in Alma's home that Eric discovers a second chance at life, away from the doldrums of forecasting weather back home. While Eric serves as the focal character of the story, additional minor characters are highlighted throughout. What was once a cast of eccentric, individualized people becomes a family in their own right, simply because of Eric's presence throughout the novel.

The final scene, in which a large dinner is held and Alma toasts to "family and being together," is particularly well done for its inclusions of characters both major and minor, and while Eric is touched upon, the finale is clearly Alma's for the taking—without her, the concluding and abundant unity is not possible.

Dialogue is used heavily, sometimes jumping from viewpoint to viewpoint, and overexplains elements of the novel, including how characters are feeling. Scenes are not always clearly focused.

Chapters move quickly from scene to scene, with problems solved easily: Eric forgets his suitcase on a train; the predicament is resolved; the scene changes to a dinner party. A lack of description prevents the narrative and characters from seeming real, though. While a quick overview is given of Alma's property—"There were beautiful old trees, shadows everywhere and a soothing tranquility about the surroundings"—the house's luxury is not brought more fully to life. The result is that many scenes with potential fall flat.

While characters are eccentric and original in their mannerisms, the book shies away from deeply dwelling in their mindsets or exploring their decisions. Even Eric does not seem to have a reason for leaving his wife, and it is left unclear why Martha seems to find his departure such a terrible surprise. Plotlines repeat, especially through conversation, making developments in the story less than captivating.

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JADE BELZBERG (January 23, 2017)

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