

Blended

Graeme Daniels

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Blended is a sympathetic, lighthearted story about the search for meaning.

A midlife search for connection and meaning drives Graeme Daniels's *Blended*, a slice-of-life story featuring one woman's thoughtful, if action-light, personal journey.

Tillie Marsden's reflections on her career and relationships give depth to the narrative, which is a candid account of her life over several months. Her days are filled by her part-time job with the American Cancer Society, her interactions with her husband and coworkers, and her thoughtful examinations of all of these events.

Tillie has a history of wanting to help others, and she always finds ways of connecting to the people around her. Her unending quest for meaning leads her to volunteer to help a refugee family settle into her small Oregon town.

Tillie becomes the listening ear for each of the Pakistani spouses. They push her comfort levels, and she receives only cursory encouragement from her husband, Bill. As she tries to navigate her role in helping the family, Tillie's thoughts wander to her own children and stepchildren. She questions the status of each relationship, particularly with Jacob, the stepson who is the last to leave her home.

As interactions with the Pakistani family increase, they act as a mirror to Tillie's appraisal of her own family. Tillie's is an inward journey, one in which she attempts to glean meaning and insight from every interaction. A few misunderstandings and incidents between Bahram, Bill, and Jacob result in the story's main, though still scant, action.

Writing flows well, and dialogue is believable. Insights from supporting characters lend the narrative depth, and the portrayal of the uprooted Pakistani family and their backstories adds a richness to the story. A bit of wry humor comes through as well, such as through a diversionary scene with Tillie's boss, where she goes against her grain. Keen observations and descriptive details make for fully fleshed-out and relatable characters.

As Tillie endlessly dissects her interactions, though, the narrative begins to drag. Never content with a situation until it is fully explored and explained, she questions the intentions of others, reads into every exchange, and explores the reasons behind her own responses at length.

Still, Tillie's story is easy to relate to, particularly for anyone who seeks deeper connections to their friends, family, and coworkers. In the end, Tillie develops a blueprint for fulfilling interactions: If you're not sure, ask; if it makes you uncomfortable, don't; and be honest.

Blended is an often lighthearted story that is sure to provide comfort to all who, like its main character, are seeking more meaning in their lives.

FELICIA TOPP (October 23, 2017)

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