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Humor

Crossing the Line?
Robin Hutchinson
CreateSpace
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★★★★☆
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The common perception that online dating services simplify a complicated selection process is debunked in *Crossing the Line?* In the hands of wise-cracking author Robin Hutchinson, the dating scene, in general, does not look too appealing, especially through the eyes of her book's timid, intelligent heroine, who is looking for Mr. Right.

Natalie Benson is a dependable pediatric nurse working in a Chicago hospital. With an established career and a number of friends, she appears to have everything going for her, but she has not met the man of her dreams. Reminiscent of the title character in *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Natalie is insecure and likeable, and comes across as a defeatist in the dating realm.

"With each bad date, I was growing further and further away from my 'ideal life,' which is a husband, two children, a home on a quiet cul-de-sac and a Mickey Mouse waffle maker. So consequently … date night for me has been spending it alone at home with a bottle of Merlot, sometimes two, eating a tasteless frozen pizza, and watching a horror movie."

After a disastrous first date with a coworker's struggling cousin—a comedy sequence that in itself is worth the price of the book—Natalie resorts to an Internet dating site to find a suitable companion, where she is matched with the ex-fiancé of her best friend, Jordan. A successful doctor, Alan is already Natalie's acquaintance and is soon to be her lover.

Though filled with polished scenes, sparkling dialogue, and laugh-out-loud humor, the story lacks a real dilemma. Built on the premise that dating a friend's former boyfriend may be a moral faux pas, the plot weakens and nearly crumbles under assumptions of wrongdoing that infiltrate the protagonist's perceptions from the moment that Alan enters her life. Natalie treats the situation as though Alan is Jordan's *current* fiancé, not simply a past flame.

Though intended to stimulate subjective views of right and wrong, the reader will be left confused nonetheless, since the plot hinges on the belief that dating a friend's former fiancé is widely accepted as bad behavior. Jordan is stereotypically petite, oriented to high fashion, and predictably superficial, leading the reader to wonder why Natalie is friends with this woman at all. The two seem to have little in common, and Natalie certainly does not like Jordan. Beneath the layers of so-called friendship is an outdated notion of what constitutes loyalty.

Embedded in *Crossing the Line?* is an underlying competitive relationship between two indecisive women, which is perhaps the real heart of the novel. This book will appeal to devoted fans of romantic comedy.

Julia Ann Charpentier