

Finding Hemingway

Ken Dortzbach

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Finding Hemingway is a romantic travel adventure with a magical realism twist.

In Ken Dortzbach's heartwarming novel *Finding Hemingway*, an overworked lawyer rushes to self-improvement while chasing a literary ghost.

Callie McGraw is adrift. Her prestigious legal career at an up-and-coming law firm ends with a decent severance package. She whiles away her days with a countdown clock to the end of her savings. Then, a lucrative job offer provides a glimpse of hope, and a phone call from legendary author Ernest Hemingway implores her to drop everything and journey to Spain. Hemingway leaves enigmatic clues and lures Callie into opening up. Callie finds a like-minded soul in a fellow American abroad, Trevor, and a vivacious and bold Spaniard, Claudio. The trio journey across Europe chasing food, wine, Hemingway, and love.

Without realizing or meaning to, Callie has lived life with everyone at arms length. The calls from Hemingway, always to her without witnesses, drip with magical realism. There's no way she's communicating with the deceased author, and the depths of his knowledge about her reinforce the likelihood that she's most encountering opportunities for personal growth. Her journey from New York to Europe is more about her confronting the specters in her past and the flaws within herself that she wants to change.

Trevor and Claudio are fascinating foils for Callie in their own ways. Trevor is more subdued and passive, with a tendency to drift with the waves rather than propel himself. Claudio, on the other hand, brims with life and passion. His every move is driven by the need to experience life and all the emotions it elicits. The two form an interesting triad with Callie; the three often clash, but always wind up learning from each other, with Callie opening up and hoping for the best rather than closing off and avoiding pain.

Dialogue captures the characters' voices, often with humor but always with a loving hand. Claudio's foreign perspective gifts him some intriguing insight into Callie and the events at hand, while Trevor's muted voice paints a man who's unsure in life, but who's willing to give it his all anyway. Callie's own voice changes as the novel progresses, from sharp and short responses to fiery tirades that shake the walls as she lets emotions in. Conversations form a clear arc, showing Trevor's eventual maturation and self-confidence when he determines his own future path.

The story luxuriates in several locations across Europe and gives ample space to allow scenes to develop. There's love to how locations are described, including Claudio's apartment, which has several bathrooms and a pair of kittens that lurk throughout. Transitions between scenes are sometimes abrupt, but hold the focus on the trio and their current locations, rather than devoting it to liminal space.

Callie's journey is filled with action, love, humor, and heart. She encounters more than the phantom voice of Hemingway and endures lasting change. Her transformation is subtle but also jarring when compared to where she

starts off, resulting in a satisfying conclusion that leaves some ambiguity about her future after the effects of her time abroad wear off.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (June 10, 2020)

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