

Floridian Nights

Lance Ringel

Distant Mirror Press (Dec 1, 2021)

Softcover \$16.95 (346pp)

978-1-73766-950-0

A gay widower contends with bereavement and new love in *Floridian Nights*, Lance Ringel's plaintive romance novel set during the late 1980s AIDS epidemic.

At thirty-five, prickly, brooding Gary meets Rick, a twenty-two-year-old waiter at a New York restaurant. Though Gary is haunted by nightmares and flashbacks about his partner, Becker, who died three years earlier, he's receptive to, if ambivalent about, finding love again. But Rick is too young to catch all of Gary's references, and he is sensitive to Gary's unfiltered remarks. Doubts about their generational gap intensify when illness prompts Gary to join his parents in Florida, and Rick follows, resulting in a road trip that lays bare their emotions.

In this moving portrayal of the ebb and flow of grief, pain is drawn with sharp clarity, combining passionate recollections with uglier rifts. Gary's lengthy relationship with Becker is grounded in complex realism. Their experiences of being gay during the 1980s are detailed in bold terms: there are hints of workplace discrimination, their nightlives are covered, they lose friends to AIDS, they are furtive about disclosing their truths. The dismaying reality is that progress is slow.

Gary is redeemed, in part, by his acknowledgment of Rick's sincerity, alongside his concessions about his own cruel tendencies. Rick is Gary's wistful, impulsive foil; his candor disarms Gary. Their conversations are sometimes prolonged, moving from misfires to affection and love. Other characters share their own perspectives on the men's new relationship: some dismiss its viability, and others encourage it. Throughout, Gary is buoyed by his close-knit friendships, and people's differences are revealed to have their own rewards.

At times raw, even cutting, the meticulous LGBTQ+ romance novel *Floridian Nights* follows a man as he risks loving again after losing a partner.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2022)

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