



Going to Beautiful

Anthony Bidulka

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In Anthony Bidulka's novel *Going to Beautiful*, a widowed celebrity chef travels to a small town, where he encounters both dark secrets and uplifting surprises.

Jake's perfect life, built from his passion for cooking and several successful restaurants, is shattered by the mysterious death of his husband, Eddie. Struggling with depression and searching for closure, Jake travels to Beautiful, in Saskatchewan, tracking Eddie's past. His close friend Baz comes along for support.

Though Eddie dies early in the novel, his relationship with Jake is conveyed well, through memories and mournful descriptions that lend context to Jake's decisions—especially as he gets involved with Beautiful's strange, serious issues.

Baz, a self-assured transwoman with the money to live extravagantly, is a charming addition. Her flirty, dry humor is similar to Jake's, but tempered with deep compassion. Their exchanges are insightful, and both wonder how their sexual identities will be received in Beautiful. Their friendship, and a slow-burning romance between Baz and a friendly farmer, results in excitement.

Beautiful's Ukrainian community raises awareness about Canadian immigration waves, even as their community enriches the novel. Ukrainian food plays a role in Jake's healing, revitalizing his passion for cooking (and living); how the townspeople worry about their community dying out parallels his own grief.

Unforeseen twists in the story meld with its intriguing relationship dynamics. Though there's suspense here, it balances with the book's elements of comedy—and its heartfelt sentiments. Jake's mission comes full circle: he finds himself in the process of his time with Beautiful, along with the answers to the questions that brought him there in the first place.

Focused on love and acceptance, *Going to Beautiful* is a captivating, sensitive novel about grief, joy, and finding one's community.

DELIA STANLEY (May / June 2022)

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