



Hindsight

Mindy Tarquini

SparkPress (Nov 8, 2016)

Softcover \$16.95 (315pp)

978-1-943006-01-4

This intriguing chronicle of past lives emphasizes the importance of acting in the here and now.

Mindy Tarquini's *Hindsight* is an evocative and inventive reincarnation tale that chronicles the past lives of an intriguing assortment of characters as they seek redemption for long-ago wrongs, yearning to influence the course of their next incarnations.

An uproarious but forlorn Chaucer professor, Eugenia is haunted by memories of her former lives. She was once Chaucer's confidante and inspiration for a character in *The Canterbury Tales*, as well as a collaborator in a horrific Bavarian event, now four hundred years in the past. She moves between accepting her hindsight—the ability to remember past lives—and speculation that she's mentally ill. When leaving one life for another, she forfeits lovers, contentment, and stability. Eugenia wants a rational explanation, and to avoid repeatedly confronting her grief. Her wrenching misery is conveyed in impeccable prose.

Nearly everyone Eugenia knows also existed in her past. Some don't recognize her. Some do—especially her student, Friedrich, who pushes her to explore their tainted history, hoping to expiate his transgressions before he's dragged into his next life. What follows is an intense, speculative, and multilayered unveiling of characters' varied incarnations throughout time, including the influence they've had on one another and the consequences of their deeds. Lively and controlled writing reveals the intersection between past and present, and the novel's otherworldliness never overshadows its pathos and humanity. Witty dialogue, underscored by Eugenia's entertaining voice, prevents *Hindsight* from falling into gloominess.

Drawing on snippets of wisdom from long-gone literary giants, including Chaucer, Dante, Goethe, and Kipling, Tarquini illustrates the eternal universality of human behavior. And while the prospect of getting a second chance at life is tantalizing, Tarquini's narrative emphasizes the importance of acting in the here and now: saying what should be said, forgiving what needs to be forgiven, embracing opportunities to deepen connections with others, and seizing moments of happiness when they're presented. Consequently, *Hindsight* is a sustaining and deeply personal reading experience.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (Winter 2017)

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