

Jimbo

R. C. Linder

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The accident that causes “Jimbo” Ferris’ demise at the outset of R. C. Linder’s quirky novel sets in motion a series of events in the character’s life that reveals a web of deliberate lies, hidden longings/imaginings, and unvarnished truth-telling.

Major story lines include those of Jimbo’s widow, Lois; their adult children Katie and Peter; Clarice, an elderly witness; two deputies investigating Jimbo’s death; and Henry Flores, the person responsible.

Jimbo was an abusive husband and father and a nasty neighbor, whose death is a welcome release for those who know him. The accident is caused by a Mexican worker, Flores, who goofs around on the job and tosses a hunk of concrete over his head that lands on Jimbo. Flores runs away, leaving his boss, Hector, to face the cops and arrest. Lies begin when Clarice fails to tell investigators what she saw, for a reason that is not really clear, even when it is revealed much later.

Two officers investigate, with the male filing an incomplete or false report, causing his female counterpart, Daniela, to get into trouble with their superior when she tries to reveal the truth.

Among the book’s many humorous scenes is Jimbo’s graveside memorial service. Members of the family speak while cemetery workers leave equipment running as they wait to complete the burial of ashes. Peter notes that he and his father had their differences, but also their good times. “I remember a vacation in San Francisco, going to Alcatraz and Golden Gate Park. It was my first time in a hotel. He paid for everything.”

Jimbo’s brother Neil, recalls that Jimbo used to “beat the hell out of me.” And finally, Neil’s new wife, who never met the deceased, says that she heard that “his kids were ungrateful jerks.” Many of the comments evoke what people would really like to say at the funeral of a Jimbo-like relative, but who offer platitudes or white lies instead.

Katie, Henry, and Daniela are in separate failed or unrequited relationships. However, Peter, a virgin, successfully woos Cassie, the sad-eyed nurse who attended to Jimbo in the hospital. There are even more surprises, however, when Peter brings her home to meet his newly-liberated mother.

Most of the story lines are successfully tied at the end, but Clarice continues to be a puzzle. No single character is the focal point of the novel, so at the book’s conclusion, Clarice’s conversation with her crazy friend Patsy is enigmatic as the story-closer.

Linder’s humor and lively dialogue carry the novel even when there are minor bumps. For example, the tense inexplicably shifts from past to present in the middle of the story. Moreover, the book would benefit from a few words about the author; a more professional and germane cover design and more fluent and readable back cover text; and publishing credentials, such as a publisher’s imprint and pricing to help it reach the audience it deserves. Its clever take on families and life should appeal to readers who enjoy comedic fiction.

LINDA SALISBURY (March 17, 2011)

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