

Clarion Review ★★★★★

GENERAL FICTION

Second Chapter

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Every day 140348 people die and 140347 of them are not prepared for it...at least according to *Second Chapter's* main character Ben Hoffman. As the book opens Ben a celebrity writer is still suffering from the death of his bride Janet who passed away due to a freak car accident on their honeymoon in Japan eight years earlier.

Though he has a beautiful home in the Mendocino Hills of California and a caring circle of friends who function as ersatz family including the predatory and self-delusional Sarah the owner of an art gallery Ben feels his life will not be complete without romantic love.

When he meets the dog Hurricane on the beach apparently abandoned his life enters into a second chapter that includes a second chance at spending time with Gretchen the second woman of his dreams. But all is not as rosy it appears. Will this chance too be taken from Ben? What is he supposed to make of all this and what is he supposed to learn from it?

The best parts of this book a first for the author include some snappy and flirtatious dialogue between Ben and Gretchen on their first dates and some endearing scenes that involve Ben exercising his natural charisma and kindness by helping an old man in a wheelchair to the beach; breaking up an altercation between his best friend Jeff and a flight attendant; and Ben trying to shore up Jeff's failing marriage.

There is also a welcome plot complication early in the book when Ben meets an attractive Asian woman on a plane who not only reminds him of his late wife but does something with her cocktail napkin that seems like a direct message from her. The character of Eva a relative of Gretchen's is well-drawn as a brusque brash woman from L.A. who speaks her mind and is the only one in the book who is an immediate match for Sarah's sharp tongue.

Most of the dialogue however is fairly banal (of the "hello how are you I am fine thanks" variety) and includes too much of the daily grind to make the book a true escape from reality. Readers may also be annoyed by *Second Chapter's* sloppy proofreading (Some apostrophes and question marks are misplaced some commas are missing "alright" pops up frequently and "outta" has been used and in a few places the text doesn't make sense due to extra words in the sentence that clearly shouldn't be there).

Despite this the story is still worthwhile as most of the characters are people one would like to know in real life and would be proud to call friends. The reader will be left convinced that Ben's life will go on to an even stronger and more resilient Third Chapter.

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