

## Surfing on a Cloud

**Stephen Buckley**

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*With elements of thrillers and erotica, this novel offers an interesting look at complex human relationships.*

*Surfing on a Cloud* by Stephen Buckley is an exploration of the intricacies of relationships, from love and lust to fear and hatred.

In his mid-twenties, Daniel Reed inherits a large sum of money from his late father's estate. Even bigger news comes from his longtime partner, Emma, who announces that she is pregnant and that she is leaving Daniel for his best friend, Jamie. Though the breakup is amicable, Emma confesses that it is spurred by Daniel's ongoing secret sexual relationship with her cousin Ross. Heartbroken, questioning, and newly rich, Daniel sets off for Bangkok in search of himself.

It does not take Daniel long to find solace in the company of others. Beautiful restaurant server May quickly becomes a love interest. Daniel is resolute in his pursuit of her. This affection is shaken, however, when he meets an attractive shipping heir, Harrison. A sudden and violent sexual assault sets Daniel down a dangerous path of addiction and depression. He spends the rest of the novel shaken and in search of inner peace.

Buckley masterfully examines different facets of love, from the strong, unyielding love shown by all the mothers featured in the text to the confusing and often infuriating romantic love found between several of the main characters. Though he is assaulted, Daniel still feels an intense affection for his attacker, and the guilt and shame of this is ever-present in his thoughts and actions. These confusing feelings are also explored in his relationship with May. He loves her dearly, but is often drawn into reckless and dangerous decisions because of his trauma.

Still, Daniel's behavior and perspective is largely static, and final resolutions are not completely satisfying. He spends beyond what seems possible, even given his inheritance, and his extravagance is often less than believable. Extortion brings him more money later, but does not explain the exorbitant lifestyle that comes before it.

Dialogue is not stilted or drawn-out. The brief novel, though it provides enough information to tell a coherent story, cannot devote much time to any one setting. As a result, characters are all interesting, but do not seem fully developed. Malapropisms and clunky syntax slow the book in parts, and a large chunk of one chapter is inexplicably italicized.

Equal parts erotica and thriller, *Surfing on a Cloud* is an interesting look at the nature of complex relationships and the ways in which modern people navigate them.

AMANDA ADAMS (October 24, 2016)

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