

The Dog Walker's Diary

Kathryn Donahue

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Kathryn Donahue's *The Dog Walker's Diary* is a smart and complex take on modern-day relationship dynamics that utilizes a story-within-a-story framework.

When busy Los Angeles literary agent Daniel hires Annie Doherty to walk his dogs, it's the start of a lively connection. It's also a much-needed distraction for him in the midst of his midlife issues.

Daniel, still single at forty-two, believes he's finally discovered the next big author—a talented and sullen millennial, Oliver. He also thinks he's landed the woman of his dreams: Victoria, a lawyer who is the ideal California woman. When she asks Daniel if he'd like to have dinner at her place, he is surprised: "You cook?" "No," she says, "but I'm very good at ordering in."

Annie is a fascinating character—a fresh-faced, uncomplicated Irish lass, though her motives come to be questioned. She weaves fabulous tales around the true lives of Daniel's dogs, Eddie and Sparks, intriguing Daniel with their adventures, which may or may not contain clues about Annie and Daniel's own growing relationship. These fanciful stories within the story are enjoyable all on their own.

At first, Daniel and Annie connect solely through the notebook in which she writes those stories. Their back-and-forth written conversations are layered and revealing. The pace of this correspondence between the couple is laconic and easygoing, and the stories themselves are far removed from Daniel's stressful day to day.

Writing elsewhere is brisk, intelligent, and poignant, with realistic and droll dialogue. Annie speaks with an authentic Irish lilt. Characters are made believable with a narrative peppering of insightful personal details.

When the real world dramatically intercedes in Annie and Daniel's burgeoning relationship about three-fourths of the way in, it is jarring and disconcerting. The tone of the book turns suspenseful, and the realism becomes uncomfortable when Daniel's life is turned completely upside down in the worst way imaginable.

Though unusually framed, *The Dog Walker's Diary* captures and retains attention with its multilayered, modern themes and very likable protagonists.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (Debut Fiction 2017)

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