

The Infinite Now

Mindy Tarquini

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The novel's potent sorcery lies in the humanity of its characters and the energy of its storytelling.

Replete with poignant details, Mindy Tarquini's *The Infinite Now* is an engrossing tightrope walk over the relational lines that connect human beings to each other and to time itself.

Fiora Vicente is the daughter of the local fortune teller in a tightly knit Italian immigrant neighborhood in Philadelphia. She is orphaned by the 1918 flu epidemic. The elderly Don Sebastiano takes her in, despite the protests of superstitious neighbors.

All Fiora has left of her mother is a strange curtain that magically manipulates time. It enables her to see the marketplace below her room five minutes into the future. When she foresees the death of someone close to her, she panics and somehow seals her little section of Philadelphia into a bubble where time moves, though there is no progress. Though this averts one disaster, it produces many others, and Fiora must struggle to overcome her fears and face the unrelenting tick of the clock.

Flu-stricken 1918 Philadelphia comes alive. Although an undercurrent of magic runs throughout the novel, the reality of the flu, its victims, and their squalor is rendered with stark and sobering clarity. Narrated in Fiora's voice, the writing achieves a satisfying lyrical terseness at times, unadorned and yet deeply meaningful.

Characters—lovely, intriguing, and frightening—steer the story to its quiet but powerful resolution. Don Sebastiano's kindly but gruff exterior conceals a heartbreaking secret. Fiora shows the courage necessary to accept life as it comes, even if that involves painful loss. But the deliciously creepy guaratrice is a constant, menacing presence, even when she is not physically in a scene.

Amidst the despair and destitution wrought by both the flu and the war, there are glimmerings of light and love that appears not always in the most obvious of places, particularly in the novel's romantic entanglements. If the present moment is maximized, "the infinite Now is limitless, it is unyielding. And it is not to be wasted."

The Infinite Now's potent sorcery doesn't lie primarily in its forays into fantasy and myth, but rather in the humanity of its characters and the energy of its storytelling.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (November/December 2017)

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