



The Truth About Goodbye

Russell Ricard

Wise Ink Creative Publishing (Apr 4, 2017)

Softcover \$15.00 (248pp)

978-1-63489-787-7

Ricard's is a satisfying and familiar love story for anyone who has dealt with incredible loss.

Russell Ricard's *The Truth about Goodbye* is a poignant portrait of the nonlinear path of grief and recovery that the loss of a loved one can wear onto hearts.

The novel's sweetly vulnerable protagonist muddles through career troubles, creative blocks, friendship, and a budding new romance in painfully relatable ways. Light reading about such heavy-hearted topics as death and moving on may be rare, but Ricard strikes the balance perfectly.

As the book opens, it is revealed that Sebastian's husband, Frank, died accidentally a year ago. Sebastian grudgingly marks his fortieth birthday with his doting best friend, Chloe. His heart is broken, his career is stunted, and his mental health is shaky.

Sebastian struggles through the most basic of tasks, both in the dance class that he teaches and in his two other gigs. He lies awake at night evaluating every creak and gust of wind for the likelihood that it's his late beloved, trying to communicate from beyond.

Chloe pushes him to move on by introducing him to the gorgeous and adoring Reid, and while he feels an attraction that surprises him, Sebastian doesn't know if he's ready and willing—or if it's even possible—to move on.

Sebastian is an absolutely believable lead, flawed but sympathetic. He carries the story almost singlehandedly. His grief, sadness, and sense of being adrift play out in myriad ways; all are recognizable to anyone who's dealt with such a sudden and heart-wrenching loss. He is erratic and almost childlike in his anguish, which rattles the chains of another deep loss when he was young.

The story sometimes veers toward hopelessness, but it also bears witness to Sebastian's growth in a way that evokes much optimism. He proclaims "I want to be happy" in surprising moments and is easy to root for as he stumbles toward that future.

Flashbacks are employed to great effect, rounding out the plot and helping explain some of Sebastian's seemingly disproportionate emotional responses. When the expected backstory finally comes through, it's perfectly satisfying. Delightful turns of phrase—like "Life struts by fast when it has a purpose"—hint at a poetic writing style.

Exposition is sometimes clumsy, but the issue resolves itself as the story progresses. Characters' histories and personal details are sometimes explained repetitively through dialogue and feel forced, but once all characters and relationships are established, it is easy to get wrapped up in their stories.

The Truth about Goodbye is satisfying romantic fiction with substance.

SARAH STEWART (July 7, 2017)

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