

The Wanting Life

Mark Rader

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Mark Rader's *The Wanting Life* is a cross-generational novel focused on happiness, fulfillment, and love.

Father Paul Novack is dying. Foregoing chemotherapy, he's resigned to letting the cancer run its course. He and his sister, Britta—who is still dealing with her own grief and self-destructive tendencies in the wake of her husband's death—spend what time he has left at a parishioner's Cape Cod house.

Paul flounders in depression, but it's not just rooted in his disease. He's hounded by regrets and thoughts of what his life might have been like if he'd left the priesthood in pursuit of romance. He asks Britta to travel with him to Rome, where he hopes to find solace in memories of his theological studies and his relationship with a young man, Luca.

Paul's narrative dominates the first half of the novel, which then gives way to Britta's daughter, Maura, who's deep in marital strife. Maura's husband discovered that she was having an affair with a man she met at an artists' retreat. Struggling through a morass of feelings, Maura is torn between perceived true love and the affection she has for her two children, one of whom has Asperger's.

Of the two intertwined stories, Paul's is the more compelling and sympathetic. Despite his persistent desires, he chose to be a celibate priest, providing guidance and comfort to others. Maura's story, including Paul's final advice to her, muddles the novel's takeaway, seeming to elevate personal happiness above sacrifice and commitment. In this examination of intimacy, sexual fulfillment is set up as the ultimate form.

The Wanting Life is a novel whose leads are unafraid to explore the complicated territory of human desire.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (January / February 2020)

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