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Clarion Review ★★★★½ AUTOBIOGRAPHY & MEMOIR

To Venus and Back: One Man's Quest to Rediscover Love

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Centered in contemporary online dating paradigms, To Venus and Back *traces a widower's pursuit of new love.*

Turner Grant's memoir *To Venus and Back* is about three years in the middle-age dating scene.

Grant and his wife were married for twenty-plus years. Following her sudden death, he decided to take several months off from work to recover and to tend to their two sons. Later, with the encouragement of his mother-in-law and his best friend, he went on a blind date and joined dating sites. But he'd only been friends with women for many years, and he found that—other than those women who were already close to him, of whom he writes with respect—they seemed to live on a different planet from him. He met over fifty women but connected with just a few.

The women Grant chose to date were, like him, professional and wealthy. Their high-powered lives fuel this lively, energetic text, which is sprinkled with superlatives. Grant is wry in recounting some of the women's odd behavior, as with one date who said that she could see ghosts; such clashes contributed to his ultimate abdication of dating. These, he suggests, are the dating challenges that people don't talk about, but should.

But the book's middle section, which concentrates on his few serious relationships, drags. Further, the inclusion of text and email exchanges between Grant and his dates, which are almost too intimate to share, bogs the book down, as do its too-exhaustive records of his conversations with them. Still, this is a pleasant, linear story that devotes itself to describing Grant's matches as people, to saying how their dates went, and to delivering clear takeaways. Glimpses of Grant's home and work lives cushion these romantic interludes. And one device—the representation of three internal voices who express their differing opinions of Grant's dates—is an effective means of reflecting the complexity of new relationships.

In the end, Grant came to the conclusion that having a conscience was not conducive to online dating. He chose to accept his situation, with the belief that love would find him there. Still, he mines his many experiences for relevant lessons, both about what online dating does not accomplish and about what it does. His final chapter compiles such lessons into a concise list, presuming that they will apply to others too.

To Venus and Back is a memoir that assesses online dating in scathing terms.

MARI CARLSON (September 29, 2022)

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