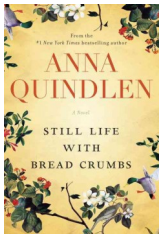


Still Life with Bread Crumbs



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Make it new! Ezra Pound once said about writing and art. Quindlen's seventh novel explores a New York City woman photographer doing just that by relocating temporarily to a small town upstate and taking entirely different kinds of photographs. Rebecca Winter has just turned sixty, gotten divorced, and her 20-something-year-old son hardly needs her anymore.

One of the first people she meets in this unnamed town is Jim Bates, a blond, pink-cheeked roofer, who blushes easily and is very kind. The first thing he helps her with is getting rid of her attic raccoon which he immediately shoots—saying it's the only way to truly get rid of a coon because otherwise it will keep coming back.

Rebecca always fusses about money. Money only dribbles in from a famous photograph from decades ago, the one that gave this book its title. Rebecca shot the picture after one of her ex's myriad dinner parties that she always had to clean up after.

She hangs out at the Tea for Two (or More) Bakery where Sarah, the owner plies her with delicious scones, and fills her in on all the town gossip. Sarah is also one of her loyal fans. There she meets Tad, a former opera student award winner, who now works as a clown.

But Jim becomes her closest friend in town; he even connects her to a job, photographing raptors for the state wildlife agency. Jim tracks the birds for them, and soon they share a bird blind in the woods.

Jim is not the kind of man Rebecca has ever dated. First off, he's much too young—45 to her 60. And he has callouses from his work. Her former husband was an intellectual with a PhD. Still, Rebecca finds herself very attracted to him.

Rebecca hikes through nearby woods and discovers several odd tableaux under trees. They all feature white crosses. Some also have a photograph of a young girl. One has a blue ribbon prize; another, an old yearbook. Rebecca doesn't touch them or move them but photographs them inspired by their strangeness and mystery.

Meanwhile, a stray dog has adopted Rebecca. She calls him "Dog" having decided that to name a pet is to forge too close an attachment to it. After a blizzard strikes and Rebecca loses power, she suddenly learns how little her city skills count. A day of cold and a night of darkness later, Dog's ears poke up at the sound of a truck. Jim has come with his snow plow to rescue her. He brings in a bottle of Tullamore Dew, and they soon find themselves in the bedroom.

This novel offers a lovely romance while also being a meditation on the artist's work. Quindlen also captures the demands and rewards of family life especially in the scenes where she visits her judgmental mother and her kind but demented dad.

Of this book, Quindlen told NPR, "I'm really intrigued by the idea that we now live long enough to get to reinvent, rediscover ourselves over and over again, and that's definitely what's happening to Rebecca."

Another interesting book about a woman who instigates major life changes his Elizabeth Berg's *Open House*.

Posted by Dory L. on March 10, 2014

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