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A Man Called Ove ||Book Review|| 2021-02-17 13:03:24

Contributors





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A Man Called Ove

Fredrik Backman is a Swedish columnist and blogger whose character Ove, first came to life in the author's blog. After over 1000 of Backman's readers voted he "write a novel "about him, *A Man Called Ove* was the result.

"What did they know about waking up on a Tuesday and no longer having a purpose?" is a question Ove asks himself, when after 40 years of marriage, he finds himself jobless and alone. It's been his wife Sonja, who's always been the buffer between himself and the world.

But can you blame him? Instead of the order and predictability he craves, what Ove is witnessing around him is: "A shed-load of men with elaborate beards, changing jobs and changing wives and changing their car makes. Just like that. Whenever they feel like it."

Ove has very definite, perhaps rigid beliefs about right and wrong too whether it's the proper way to make coffee or the brand of car to own (only a Saab). Ove sees the world in black or white while his wife was "colour."

The author has created a plausible "voice" for his curmudgeonly main character and the lens through which such a man might evaluate the world.

I was surprised to discover Backman is only 33. He is a self-described "college drop-out" who says he based

the character of Ove, on an argument he had with his own father. We're told Ove is 59, he would have been more believable for me, as an older man.

We get a taste of urban Swedish life, in this novel, where knowing your neighbour and having community is valued but where immigration and changing beliefs and values are changing the landscape.

Ultimately though, Ove is able to demonstrate to a father the importance of standing by his son. And it is in fighting an attempt to move an elderly neighbour into a senior's facility that becomes the lightning rod for rallying the community and ultimately Ove.

You can hear Backman's respect for his elders and those who have skills working with their hands. His character Ove gets into difficulty, in part because of his inability to decode people's behaviour, understand "foreigners" or show flexibility. Or as Ove puts it "It is difficult to admit one is wrong, particularly if one has been wrong for a very long time." He helps us notice our own judgements.

The book deals with dark subject matter at times, when Ove can see only one way out of his loss and loneliness. Depression among the elderly or people dealing with the loss of a partner is a very real problem that too often goes undetected.

However, Ove's repeated efforts to find a resolution to his situation lose their impact for me. I got it the first time. On the other hand I became so attached to Backman's character that I broke a "rule" of mine and skipped to the end to make sure Ove was still there too.

This book would be suitable for young adult to adults. *A Man Called Ove* is rich with themes about youth and aging, and loss and how immigration can change a community for the better; it presents these issues in a way that opens the discussion and helps us see our blind spots. Backman would make a great interview at Wordfest.







