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A READER'S JOURNAL

Come What May
A Novel
by
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ARJ2 Chapter: Reading for Enjoyment
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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2015

"It's time to call hospice" is the powerful first line of this novel, launching Rick within twenty pages into his post-Sarah life which fills the rest of this

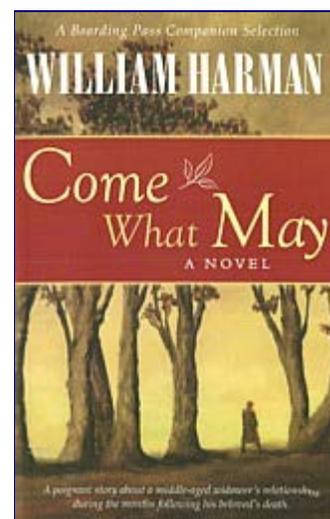
book.

[page 7] It was the coming of Christmas and the knowledge that it would be Sarah's last that finally got to Rick. He felt melancholy and depressed, yet he had always tried to be positive for Sarah. It was she who was terminally ill, not Rick. If Sarah was able to accept her condition and able to do it with grace and occasional humor, then Rick could surely find the strength to be tougher. Sarah needed that.

One does better to prepare for a transition than for a loss. There is no way to prepare for a loss; a loss is a negative thing, a non-thing, and attempting to do so can lead to a melancholic depression. Preparing for a loss can mean seeing oneself with one's loved one from a distance and feeling bad because that can never happen again. This would be accompanied by pain and grief and the fall into depression is likely. If one prepares instead for a transition, however, one accepts that one's loved one has transitioned into their new life in the spiritual world, and with that attitude, one can do one's best to adjust to that new reality. That can expedite one's own transition into a new reality, a life without the loved one in the physical world. Rightly understood, the departed loved one suffers immensely if their life in the spiritual world is not acknowledged by the grieving ones who remained behind, especially if they sob constantly about the death of their friend and loved one. Death is only properly understood as a transition point into a new life, not as a permanent nothingness, as materialist scientists would have everyone believe.

How can you deal with the transition in a life-enhancing manner? By remembering the departed one when you two were together in some really good time, to place yourself into that memory next to your loved one, and feel how you felt next to them as you dwell on the memory. For Rick, he could imagine Sarah, whom he later referred to as his *Auspuffengel*, exhaust-pipe Angel, which is what Germans called their lady riding behind them on their motorcycle. (Page 38) If one has such a memory, holding onto the handlebars and feeling your Angel holding onto you with her hands around your waist, you will certainly feel good; you will have brought good feelings into a memory of your departed Angel.

Remembering good times in the first person will have two salubrious effects: your own grieving will move to good feelings when something reminds you of your loved one, and your departed loved one will be pleased when you acknowledge their continued existence as alive in the spiritual world. Know that whenever some item around the house, a photo or piece of furniture perhaps, brings your loved one to



your mind, that loved one is there immediately, as soon as you think of them, and your thoughts will flow to them.

The alternative to the above is a deep, dark depression, and a possible spiraling into ill health triggered by the constant wish to be with the loved one again. Most people don't realize they have this choice in their way to respond, but there are two ways: treat it as a loss, or treat it as a transition.

Rick was preparing for a loss and a deep depression apparently, and it will take us the rest of the novel to find how he met the very challenges he set up for himself.

[page 15] Rick had known that that moment was coming. There was nothing he could do about it. Anyway, how does one prepare for such a loss? Rick didn't know. Does anyone? Still, life during the past several weeks had been anything but real. Now reality would begin, and certain things required immediate attention. Better to stay busy, he realized, because the black cloak of depression was waiting to envelop him at any moment.

Rick and Sarah's Christmas tree always had an electric train, a passenger train, which was pulled by its steam engine around the tree's base. Sarah always insisted on a caboose even though a caboose is only necessary for a freight train, to house its crew. Soon Sarah was gone from the passenger compartment of life, moved into the caboose of death, and it tugged at Rick's heart to see the little caboose sitting still as he picked up the train set to pack it away with the other Christmas decorations.

Living along the lower east coast, Rick apparently knew of *The Great Dismal Swamp* as a marshy area in the Coastal Plain Region of southeastern Virginia, and it seemed an apt metaphor for his upcoming challenges, especially when the busy-ness of answering condolence cards, etc, had waned. He answered them all.

[page 20] That was pure Rick. But those time-fillers would run out quickly. The void continued to expand. Rick felt that he was no longer living, just existing in a state of limbo. He began to refer to his life as being in *The Great Dismal Swamp*, a reference eventually shortened to simply "the swamp." Was that a right-of-passage for all widowers, he wondered? How does one deal with that new world, one that is unwelcoming and uninviting.

A new friend, Gwyneth, joined the board of directors of the art center that Rick served on. Her arrival in Rick's life provide his first distraction as they began dating. She and Rick loved Philly Cheese Steaks, and with her as company Rick began his trip into reality again. One day, Gwyneth suggested a day trip down to Boca Grande.

[page 28] One Saturday they packed a picnic lunch for an outing to Boca Grande. Gwyneth spread a checkered cloth on a picnic table near the lighthouse and opened a half-liter bottle of Chardonnay and a small cooler of finger sandwiches. The only thing missing was a candelabrum, Rick observed.

Next step for Rick was the drive up north for the final service, a scattering of Sarah's ashes in the sand dunes of the Outer Banks of North Carolina. He called Nick and Mary to schedule a few days visit during which the service would be held. Both of his kids had to travel long distances so he booked a room at the Sea Oats Bed and Breakfast for them. He stopped for the night on the ride north at New Bern, where he and Sarah had looked at a boat called *Tristan*. The clerk suggested he try the *Angus Grille*, and Rick found a young and enticing heifer there that he liked, Catherine, and they enjoyed a meal together and shared phone numbers.

Arriving further north, he and his children held a brief ceremony and deposited Sarah's ashes into a Hatteras sand dune. Later he returned alone to the sand dune to be alone with his thoughts. The dune became a place for him to connect with Sarah's spirit.

[page 60] "Good-bye, Sarah. I love you. Peace be with you."

Rick turned from the dune, walked down to the ocean and looked out as far as he could see. Sarah was with him now, in the dune, a part of the land he stood on, he said to himself, and someday she would be out there. As the cold surf washed his bare feet, for a moment they were together again.

The trip back home raised Rick's spirits because he anticipated a reunion with his new friend Catherine in New Bern. She invited him to a home-cooked meal at her place, and Rick was treated to a chicken piccata prepared by a master chef and served in a warm and intimate setting.

[page 66] The chicken practically burst with flavor and tasted more like expensive veal scallopini. The maestro had performed masterfully. The dessert, which Catherine had kept as a surprise, was a French apple tart.

The supper was great and only one bedroom was needed for the rest of the evening — as they wrote in old novels, "you can guess what happened next." The ride home to Sevilla in Florida got Rick thinking of what he would do next. No more pressing engagements, so the world was open to his every wish. He thought of his old friend Hans Reichenbach in Germany, of the summer he spent with Hans and his family on a student exchange program. Was Hans still around and would he be open for a visit? This led to Rick visiting Hans and his wife in Starnberg in the outskirts of Munich. Bavaria in the summer time is wonderful, much more comfortable than the bitter cold winters there.

After several days of touring the Bavarian countryside with Hans, his wife Ursela arranged a dinner party at which Karin, a widow from Gautig came. Rick and Karin became friends, both being of German ancestry. Karin was born in Koblenz and told Rick of the devastation her city experienced during the war. Rick shared that his grandparents left Bremen after the First World War and settled in the Philadelphia area where his grandfather worked as a machinist.

[page 104] "So you are *Norddeutscher* and I am *Rheinlanderin*, and now we are both Bavarians," said Karin, smiling.

"Yes, a common heritage with good common friends, the Reichenbachs."

If you guessed what happened next, think again, this was not Catherine and not America, but rather it was Karin and it was post-war Germany. A large ocean divided Karin and Rick.

[page 141, 142] As they stood together for the last time, Karin told Rick that she could fall in love with him. She wanted him to know that no matter what the future might hold, she too was consumed by the ambivalence and uncertainty of another intimate relationship, one that he probably felt. But she knew, deep down, that she did want him to return. She was absolutely certain of that. Rick told her that he had found peace — inner peace — while he was with her. He would return. The embrace was long and passionate, as if he were going off to war. Neither wanted to let go. Karin got into the car, started the engine, and said, "Come back, Rick." And drove away.

Arriving at the airport back home, Rick's head was probably still spinning with possibilities, Karin, Catherine, and Gwyneth, as he lifted his bags into Gwyneth's Jaguar, but her comment, "You really should get new suitcases", definitely stopped the spinning. In the spin of a roulette wheel you can win with your bet on either Red or Black, but there's also the 00 slot where nobody wins, and Gwyneth's ball had just dropped into that losing slot. That left Karin or Catherine for the next spin of the wheel of Rick's life. Which one will find a slot in Rick's heart? Will it be Catherine the sexy gourmet chef on the Atlantic Coast? Or Karin the gentle Frau in Bavaria? Will he choose a *pièce de résistance* meal or a Bavarian peace?

