

Marion Winik Has Kissed A Lot Of Frogs

by Roz Warren

Writer Marion Winik has ridiculously bad taste in men. She's an intelligent woman and a terrific writer, a good mom with a good heart, and ALL of her romantic relationships are train wrecks.

Winik recounts her quest for love at age 50 in her new book, "Highs In The Low Fifties: How I Stumbled Through The Joys of Single Living," and no matter how tumultuous or misguided your own love life has been, she'll put you to shame.

The healthiest relationship she describes is with first husband, Tony, who, when they met, was a "penniless gay bartender who had recently lost his job as an ice-skating coach due to his drug problem."

Winik fell hard for this guy. Why? "Having a beautiful gay man change his life to be with me was like getting the Nobel Prize for lovability," she explains. Plus, the man could "cook, bartend, devise and execute wall treatments, garden, iron, arrange flowers, set a perfect table and professionally cut and color my hair."

(Which almost makes me want to marry a gay man myself.)

They got hitched, had two sons, enjoyed some good years, and endured some bad ones, before Winik's husband died of AIDS.

And, romantically, it's all been downhill from there.

Winik, to be sure, brings her own challenges to the romantic table. She describes herself, in a self-deprecating moment, as "an

alcoholic, manic-depressive slut.” She's also an ex-junkie. And she smokes.

But she writes like an angel. With a wicked sense of humor.

Winik, who has published 9 books, makes a good living writing about her unconventional life. She writes for the New York Times, she's a regular on *All Things Considered*, she blogs for Baltimore Fishbowl.com, she's a professor at the University of Baltimore's MFA program, and she's been on the “Today Show,” “Politically Incorrect” and “Oprah.”

Solid career success hasn't stopped her from establishing a track record, in her personal life, of passing up great guys to throw herself at losers.

Some women enjoy being courted over a quiet, candle lit dinner. Winik goes for edger stuff. A typical seduction? “He led me to a floodlit, garbage-swept concrete parking lot surrounded by a chain-link fence.... with no further preliminaries, a furious make-out session was in progress.”

Winik, it turns out, is a woman in her 50s who dates like a hormone-drunk teenager. She may be looking for love. But what she finds, instead, are thrills. And when she finds them, she shares every juicy, peculiar, hilarious and humiliating detail with her readers.

I hate to see a smart woman make a foolish choice, yet I loved this book. Why? I'm a sucker for a good sentence, and Winik couldn't pen a boring line if she tried. Her love life may be a mess but it's also great material, and she makes the most of it.

She describes swapping spit with, among others, a construction worker who beds her so he can hit her up for cash, a young ex-student who already has an age appropriate girlfriend, her own

second husband, years after their acrimonious divorce, and a dude whose personal ad claimed he'd only ever been with two women -- his ex wife and her best friend.

Winik thought he was joking. He wasn't.

Ironically, while all this was going on, Winik was writing an advice column for a national magazine.

Fans of Winik's earlier books know that she's not just an engaging writer, but a good mom and a good friend. She deserves to find Mr. Right! But it's clear to the reader of this new volume that the chances of that happening are slim. (One hint: the book is dedicated, not to a dude, but to that ever reliable bed partner, her miniature dachshund.) Still, you keep hoping that this clever chick with the appalling blind spot when it comes to sussing out good guys, will somehow come to her senses and fall for a mensch.

Yes, there's a touch of schanfreude in the pleasure you get from this book. (Not to mention a heap of comfort for those of us whose own romantic choices have been less than fabulous.) It's fun to watch someone else screw up, as long as it's played for laughs. ("I Love Lucy," anyone?)

And if there's one thing Winik excels at, it's laughing at herself.

She isn't afraid to play the fool. And she shares everything, from her Match.com profile ("Sassy, sensual and smart") to the absolute wrong way to seduce a gay guy ("I sexted him a picture of me lying on the couch in my bikini underpants.")

We've got front row seats to even the most embarrassing encounter. But it's Winik herself, as the writer who chronicles these events, who has the last laugh. Prior to publication, she may let her bad

dates fact-check “their” chapters, and she's changed a few names, but she's retained the power to present her life as she sees fit.

The key to Winik's continued success is that she's, ultimately, so likeable. You wince at her mistakes and despair at her dating decisions, but you can't help rooting for her, despite the fact that she always leads with her libido and seems never to have met a Stupid Choice she didn't want to make out with in a midnight parking lot.

But then, she's not really looking for Mr. Right. What she really wants is a dude whose kisses will make her forget all reason.

And when she finds him, thankfully, we can always rely on her to tell us all about it.

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