



## An Unfinished Marriage

**Cindy Bonner**

Deck Night Press

(338pp)

979-898592257-8

*Navigating grief, regret, relief, and empowerment in scenes that linger, An Unfinished Marriage is a powerful novel.*

In Cindy Bonner's powerful novel about heartbreak and rebuilding, *An Unfinished Marriage*, a couple reckons with the potential unraveling of their relationship.

Sarah met Adam in college. They married and had sons; she intended to grow old with him. But over the years, Adam became more devoted to alcohol than to his wife.

When Adam drives home drunk one night and tells Sarah that he doesn't think he loves her anymore, she begins to acknowledge how little she is getting from her relationship after all. Then Troy, a contractor, comes to work on the couple's Queen Anne house, and Adam's inadequacies seem to compound overnight. Indeed, Troy's arrival makes stark the contrast between receiving care from another and going through the motions of a relationship, leading Sarah to make wrenching decisions on behalf of her family.

The characterizations are built on acute details, as of the little ways in which Adam fails to show up—at family dinners; when it comes to putting together a bicycle on Christmas Eve. In contrast, Sarah starts the coffee before Adam gets up, she always has food in the house for her children and has the laundry done, and she entertains Adam's business partner on Christmas Eve. Adam's and Troy's differences are more exaggerated, though. They are polarizing figures in the story, compromising some of its verisimilitude: Adam acts in ways that make him seem irredeemable, while Troy is near perfect in his responses to Sarah. Meanwhile, Sarah's best friend, Carolyn—present as her confidant and comforter—masks her envy of the couple's relationship and children.

Details from the 1980s are used to set up the trio's juicy interactions. There are notes about the mercenary machinations of finance guys; there are fraught outings Christmas shopping at the mall. In one scene, Sarah's son digs a Chewbacca figure out of the trash as he contemplates moving to a new place, his enthusiasm for the discarded toy renewed.

Navigating grief, regret, relief, and empowerment in scenes that linger, the multinarrative structure keeps the story even. Sarah, Adam, and Troy tell their sides of the story in turn, moving through the emotional turmoil of falling in love and out of love and facing the potential of hurting Sarah and Adam's children with a divorce. Sarah fights nostalgia for her old relationship; she fears leaving the life she knows behind and tries to figure out what comes next for her and her family. Through it all, the three develop better understandings of themselves and each other.

The emotive novel *An Unfinished Marriage* is about the beginning of true self-understanding. In it, three people see themselves and each other without filters and choose how to move forward.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (November 9, 2024)

*Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a*

*positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.*