



If Only

Vigdis Hjorth

Charlotte Barslund, Translator

Verso Books (Sep 3, 2024)

Softcover \$19.95 (352pp)

978-1-83976-888-0

In Vigdis Hjorth's powerful novel *If Only*, a playwright develops an obsession with an older professor that spirals into an all-consuming love affair.

At thirty years old, Ida is married with two children. She has a successful career as a writer of radio plays. Yet she feels unfulfilled, waiting "for the heartbreak that will turn her into her true self." At a seminar, she meets Arnold, an older professor. The two share a night together before returning home to their respective spouses. Later, Ida receives a series of postcards from Arnold and is surprised by the depth of feeling they stir in her.

Soon, thoughts of the professor consume her days and her marriage dissolves. Month after month, Ida attempts to draw her lover to her through letters and phone calls. But Arnold is reluctant to return her adoration, offering her only enough crumbs of affection to sustain her bottomless love. For years, they meet at conferences alone. Ida becomes paranoid and frantic, driving away even her closest friends and family. Still, she remains confident that the day will come when Arnold will realize his true feelings for her. After three long years, he does, and the two travel from city to city, embroiled in a disastrous relationship that leaves them both scarred.

The narrative makes sparing, effective use of jumps in time to give a sense of the larger trajectory of Ida's life. This device lends the novel perspective: Ida's feelings shift, and she begins to envision a life beyond the endless circles of infatuation and abuse.

Feverish and intoxicating, *If Only* is a novel about the depths of a life-altering devotion and the connections between love, creativity, and self-making.

BELLA MOSES (September / October 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.