

★ **Sipsworth****Simon Van Booy**

Godine (May 7, 2024)

Hardcover \$26.95 (240pp)

978-1-56792-794-8

In Simon Van Booy's charming novel *Sipsworth*, a widow and a mouse forge an unexpected, exceptional bond.

Helen grieves for her husband, her son, and the strength of her once-youthful body. She returns to the village of her childhood, leading a monotonous life by design: it keeps her from dwelling on the past. Then, she encounters an unwanted visitor in her home—a mouse. After some unsuccessful attempts to capture the creature, she grows attached to him, the rodent in her cupboards. Naming him Sipsworth, she thinks she has finally found someone to listen to her; her life is illuminated anew.

While relatively contained in narrative scope, the novel rewards patient reading. Much is revealed through tiny moments that have much to say. Helen's relationship with Sipsworth is rounded out and satisfying; the animal's friendship helps to heal her.

Much of Helen's backstory comes via her stories to Sipsworth, revealing snippets of a life well lived. And the gaps in Helen's tales reveal as much about her character as the parts that she chooses to state. The prose is simple yet lovely; the story sneaks up on the reader's affections, as deft as Sipsworth himself. It's a tale of aging, grief, and the mundane details that make up a person's existence after great losses. These pieces reveal something profound about the human need for connection (no matter how small the recipient of that connection may be).

In the generous, vibrant, and quiet novel *Sipsworth*, connections and kindness are easy to secure for those who take the time to get to know someone who might otherwise be thought of as a pest.

CHLOE CLARK (May / June 2024)

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