



The Sea Is Quiet Tonight: A Memoir

Michael H Ward

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This is a gripping story of a man's struggle to survive AIDS, and a touching memoir about a relationship that ended too soon.

In the early 1980s, when AIDS was still a new and misunderstood threat, Michael Ward's partner, Mark Halberstadt, contracted the disease. Ward's memoir *The Sea is Quiet Tonight* is the memorable and emotionally affecting story of that time, charting how he met and fell in love with Mark, and how that love survived throughout Mark's diagnosis and death.

Ward wisely spends a good quarter of the book on the days before AIDS was even on his radar. In his late thirties, he met Mark during a trip to Fire Island. Readers get to know Mike and Mark through their sailing adventures, the meeting of family members, and as they navigate their life together in Boston.

Ward writes about the difficulties of beginning a relationship while nearing middle age, and the challenges of living as a gay man in a less-than-accepting society. He introduces the threat of the disease gradually, as he and Mark read or hear news reports of a mysterious illness killing gay men in New York, and as friends of theirs become unexpectedly sick. They wait for the inevitable but are still unprepared for Mark's diagnosis.

Ward has a knack for scene setting. He uses minor details to evoke the era, and each player's dialogue is distinct and relatable. He also captures the early enigma of AIDS: how little doctors knew about treatment, and how scary it was for gay men, who might or might not have contracted it. He describes Mark's treatment and condition in detail, placing readers in the hospital through every unclear test and life-or-death decision. The book benefits from the immediacy of the writing, as Ward lets the story play out as it happened rather than taking a looking-back perspective.

The Sea is Quiet Tonight serves as an important reminder of what AIDS represented in its early days. It is a gripping story of a man's struggle to survive the disease, and a touching memoir about a relationship that ended too soon.

JEFF FLEISCHER (Winter 2017)

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