



## The Next Best Thing

*Kristan Higgins*

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# **The Next Best Thing**

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Lucy Lang isn't looking for fireworks...

She's looking for a nice, decent man. Someone who'll mow the lawn, flip chicken on the barbecue, teach their future children to play soccer. But most important... someone who won't inspire the slightest stirring in her heart...or anywhere else. A young widow, Lucy can't risk that kind of loss again. But sharing her life with a cat named Fat Mikey and the Black Widows at the family bakery isn't enough either. So it's goodbye to Ethan, her hot but entirely inappropriate "friend with privileges" and hello to a man she can marry.

Too bad Ethan Mirabelli isn't going anywhere. As far as he's concerned, what she needs might be right under her nose. But can he convince her that the next best thing can really be forever?

## **The Next Best Thing Details**

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## From Reader Review The Next Best Thing for online ebook

### Didi says

Sometimes I don't even know what to say! We've all read books that resonate with us and affect us long after we've turned the last page. This was one of those books for me. I LOVED IT! I've just come to accept that Kristan Higgins writes for me...well, not for me specifically, but for people like me. Her stuff is always emotional and sweet and funny. But sometimes it's also excruciatingly heartbreakingly sad. But there's always an underlying hope in her books, so yes, for people like me, WE LOVE THAT!

Lucy is a young widow who lost her husband to a fatal car accident almost 6 years ago. She's decided it's time to start dating again. She wants a family, kids and a husband that won't stir anything in her dormant heart. Just someone she likes, gets along with, but NO LOVE. Problem is, she's been having a friends-with-benefits with her handsome neighbor, Ethan. So he needs the axe, because she's ready...but not for him to be in the running.

Lucy was also trained as a pastry chef but works as a bread maker in her family's bakery. I was salivating half the time over all the yummyness Lucy was baking! The bakery is mainly run by the 3 Black widows--her mother and two aunts--all losing their husbands prematurely, so you could say it runs in the family\*\*grimace\*\*. So Lucy starts her quest for a husband but Ethan won't give up, he wants a chance, a chance Lucy is not willing to give.

I really felt for Lucy and can't imagine how it feels to lose the love of your life so early on. She wasn't quite over Jimmy, seeing him in places, hearing him sometimes. She always compared everyone to him and although I could empathize, it started getting on my nerves. Especially since Ethan was so willing. So eager to prove he could be the one for her. But she kept pushing him away and after a while it bothered me. The worst part of it all was she knew, KNEW, her connection to Ethan was real, and that scared the crap out of her. I often wished Ethan would say something, but he always gave her patience and the time to figure it out. He was such a great guy. So nice and sweet, but strong and comforting. I really fell for him. She deserved his anger not his understanding at times.

And the Black widows, while a fun bunch, they seemed to discourage Lucy from trying to re-marry. They weren't supportive and although they may have felt scared to find love after their own loss, I don't think giving that same advice to a young widow was rational. Some people don't want to move on, don't have the capacity. But not everyone. I'm so glad Lucy strove for more in her life than just being a widow. That was her main fear, being MORE than a widow. Perhaps finding another love and proving her first love wasn't meant to be her only. Her mom was also not supportive, it really upset me that she didn't try and understand her daughters dilemma.

Needless to say this book did a number on me! I was crying and slobbering one minute, laughing and clutching my heart another, sigh. Some scenes really did me in. One scene while Lucy was watching her wedding video with a date, she notices something she never had before---I swear, I was an emotional mess. Another scene towards the end where she confronts Ethan at his new restaurant--again, an emotional landslide of feelings!

The romance was beautiful, the realizations that life doesn't end with tragedy, the promise of hope and a love like no other, the ability to strive for MORE...can't say enough! Loved this book! And like typical KH, fade to black sex, but don't mistake that for no steam. There is, and it's hot. But the writing and story are so moving, so good, so...GAH!!! Just amazing! That you don't notice the fades. Don't get fooled by the cover or

book jacket either, this isn't fluff.  
If you haven't read KH, you really should, she's amazing!

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### **Jennifer says**

The Next Best Thing is the second installment in Kristan Higgins's adult contemporary romance series: Gideon's Cove. This was a heartbreak, conflicted, and healing novel. As a reader, in my opinion, the heroine is not easy to love because she's "stuck" and can't quite see what's right in front of her but don't give up on her because grief can be a frustrating and long process that sometimes doesn't make sense to bystanders much less to the person actually going through it. I connected with the emotions that were running strong in this story: the guilt, fear, panic, and all the other very human responses to trying to resume life after half of you is torn away. I loved this book which makes total sense because the fabulous Kristan Higgins wrote it. If you haven't experienced this author yet then grab any title and get started!! Series or not, they all can be read as standalones. Enjoy!

#### **My favorite quote:**

*"...a good father loves his daughter like no one else. He adores her, protects her, bails her out when she gets in trouble, defends her from her mother's chastisement. He urges her to be whatever she wants (president, astronaut, princess), and later in life, advises on which boy is good enough for her (none) and when she can start dating (never)."*

Kristan Higgins's Gideon's Cove series includes the following installments as of March 2018:

- #1-Catch of the Day
- #2-The Next Best Thing
- #3-Somebody to Love

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### **Mo says**

3.75 Stars

Enjoyed it. Seemed to drag a bit in the middle ... Lucy sort of annoyed me with her wishy washy, couldn't make up her mind what she wanted attitude. I loved Ethan. He was so sweet.

**Alone again, naturally, like that sappy song I'd discovered in my parents' tape collection.  
Oh, I'd love that song! Many happy, maudlin hours were spent weeping and singing along  
to my cassette player, until my mom burst in one day, snatched the tape from the machine  
and snapped it in half..**

LOL. Gilbert O'Sullivan - Waterford's finest, mentioned in a KH book. Was never a huge fan but Himself loves him.

**"Let me tell you, we're awfully happy when you showed up, Lucy. Sure, you weren't Italian, but at least you were Catholic and a nice girl, you know what I mean?"**

Sweet, sweet ending ... and epilogue.

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### **A\_Ryan says**

#### **5+++ "Totally Blew Me Away" Stars!!!**

**The best bits:** Ok, I'm just going to say it. Pretty much EVERYTHING was the best bit!!!

This has got EVERYTHING!! It's a forbidden love/ best-friends-to-lovers/ friends-with-benefits/ neighbours-in-love/ reluctant lovers/ romantic comedy/drama that will burst your heart, keep you up late at night, and ultimately stay with you for a long time after you've finished.

And it's by Kristan Higgins!!! It's no secret that I DEVOUR everything this woman writes. And *The Next Best Thing* is one of her very best.

I totally swooned over Ethan, Lucy became a best friend by the end of page 2, and the Black Widows felt like family.

I loooved the way the H loved Lucy in this story. I felt it all the way down to my toes.... it's why I'm a sucker for romance. That *irrepressible feeling* you get when you read about true love. The kind that conquers all. A love that's passionate and patient and unconditional. The kind that surges off the pages and still lingers between every line. Yeah baby... that's the stuff!

**The worst bits:** None. Nada. Zip. For me, this story was perfection. (Well, the cat should have been a dog, but I'll let it slide!)

**Recommended for:** fans of KH awesomeness, fans of slightly taboo/best friend romances that take place in small communities, filled with humour and heart-break, quirky characters and an amazing beta-man hero!

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### **willful says**

While I admire Higgins for writing different and difficult romance plots, this one was just too challenging for me. Falling in love with an in-law after you're no longer in-laws is one thing, and Higgins does that plot fairly gracefully elsewhere. But a widow using her husband's younger brother as a booty call... well, that's pretty icky, and from skimming the book, she just generally comes off like a callous, clueless user. I'm not going to give a rating though, since I didn't read it through. I am looking forward to seeing the character of Parker, who seems very sensible and likable, get her own story in *Somebody To Love*.

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## Carrie says

Pros: Kristan Higgins can write. You won't find clunky phrasing or bad transitions in the book. The writing is tight and solid.

Ethan is a great hero. I loved him and his sexy, gentle ways.

Cons: Lucy was a totally unappealing and unsympathetic heroine. She's emotionally stunted (and surrounded by emotionally-stunted family, her mother being the worst), self-absorbed, dense, and obsessive. Almost 6 years after her husband of 8 months died, she is still wallowing in self-righteous grief. She can't walk through the cemetery, she can't eat her own desserts, she buys expensive cloths she won't wear, and can't see the great guy she has right in front of her. Oh, yeah, and she watches and rewatches her wedding video! This is not a "funny but flawed" heroine. This is the portrait of a woman in dire need of professional help~ grief counseling at the very least. (The only person in the book who is really emotionally healthy is Parker, the mother of Ethan's son.)

Higgins often uses cringeworthy scenes of embarrassment and/or humiliation for humor. Many authors do this and I know it's popular. It's not my favorite, although it can be funny if not overdone.

The ending came together a little too neatly. We're suppose to believe that Lucy finally let it all go in one fell swoop and was miraculously able deal with all the grief and doubts, even though she'd had Ethan in front of her for years and hadn't been able to see the truth.

I had a aha moment while reading this book: Ms. Higgins has a habit of writing self-absorbed, dense, and obsessive heroines.

I gave this book 3 stars because of the writing and Ethan. ;-)

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## Miss Kim says

Kristan Higgins is going on my 'must read least'. This is my second read by her, after Catch of the Day, which I really enjoyed. She writes in first person, so that may put off some readers. However I don't mind. I like this one, the man communicates very openly so there really isn't a question about what he is thinking.

Lucy has been a widow for over five years, after losing her husband in a car accident when she was 25. She's still trying to put her life back together. She's part owner of a bakery with her two aunts and her mother. The three sisters are known as the Black Widows. Their maiden name is Black, and there's there pesky problem of all of their husbands dying young. All three older women have sworn off ever finding a second husband, and discourage Lucy from entertaining the idea.

What they don't know is that she's been seeing her dead husband's brother on the sly for about two years. They've had a 'friends with benefits' set-up, that they are both comfortable with. One day she decides to drop a bomb on Ethan by telling him that she's going to start looking for a husband, so they should probably stop having sex. He takes it well, or so she thinks. Through this entire book she is blind that Ethan has been in love with her for years. She has an image of her husband that no one can ever live up to. Even his parents

favored the dead son over Ethan, which hurts him, too.

She is convinced that it is inappropriate for her to be going out with her brother-in-law-- even though it was ok to have sex? She goes out on a series of crappy dates. She wants to find someone boring and safe that doesn't do anything risky to bring along another early death. She thinks her family is cursed. Her sister is happy with a husband that she over protects. She also has a new baby, and every time she sees her she is filled with longing for a baby so badly.

Ethan spends a lot of time trying to convince her to give him a shot at a real relationship, and stop comparing him to his brother. Meanwhile, he suffers through watching her date a parade of losers instead of him. By his actions in this story, there was never a doubt in my mind that has always loved her.

The supporting characters are funny and abrasive at the same time. I highly recommend this read, and it comes with a sweet HEA

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### **Karen says**

Another fabulous romance, as expected from Kristen Higgins. My only issue with this one was the issue of the SHS. (stupid heroine syndrome) Lucy was a likeable character, but she just couldn't see the forest through the trees sometimes. She was fairly self-absorbed most of the time, and her epiphany was long in coming. But I suppose I'll cut her some slack, she did have quite a bit to deal with.

And luckily, there was Ethan... who I myself am now madly in love with. He evened out the score in this one. As she tortured the poor guy until I thought she'd ruin things completely, he bore it all, with little more than a twitching muscle on his face. Not a doormat though, I wouldn't call him that by any means. But he was steadfast. A truly great guy.

I loved the ending. And especially the epilogue. Well done.

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### **Jonetta says**

Lucy Mirabella was widowed 5 1/2 years ago at the at the age of 25. Her husband's death devastated her and she's unwilling to go through that kind of pain again. Her solution is to find someone that she can like, raise a family and move on again. The person can never be her one true love again because she doesn't think she could survive it.

Lucy is surrounded by lots of family who are committed to keeping her grieving. Her aunts and her mother, known as the Black Widows (maiden name is Black and they were all widowed young), think Lucy is following their tradition and should be committed to staying single and martyred. Her in-laws want her to keep their favored son enshrined for the rest of her life. Thank goodness for her friend Parker who brings

some balance to the mix, encouraging Lucy to live full out. Lastly, there's Jimmy's younger brother, Ethan, who's stood by her and been her best friend throughout.

I liked this story, full of humor, quirky characters and Lucy's angst as she struggles to release the shackles of the hurtful loss of her husband and those around her who would keep her crippled. She knows she needs to move on and has come up with her own scheme for how to do it, in spite of her family. Ethan is an extremely appealing character, who unknown to Lucy (because she's deaf, dumb and blind to it!) has always loved her. He gives her space to get where she needs to be, even at his own expense. Some may find Lucy terribly frustrating but her journey is realistic, especially when you factor in the lovable nuts around her.

I enjoyed each character and what they added to the story, no matter that they sometimes drove me crazy. It's well written and I found it hard to put the book down.

(FYI - Higgins' book, *Somebody to Love*, is a sequel to this story.)

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### **BookLover says**

I loved my escape to the fictional town of Mackerly this week. This story was rich with a town full of enchanting characters.

Lucy becomes a part of a group of family members dubbed "The Black Widows" after losing her husband Jimmy several years ago. I loved the interaction between these women consisting of Lucy's mother and two aunts. They were very entertaining and I loved every scene they were in. Lucy handled all of their oddities like a champ, especially her mom's constant criticism of her lack of fashion sense.

**"Then her gaze drops down to my faded jeans with the fraying hem, my utterly unremarkable brown wool sweater. "Is that what you're wearing?" she asks. "No. I'm wearing a ball gown, but it's invisible." I twirl around, taking care not to spill the goodies. "Do you like it?"**

Lucy's entire family, especially Lucy and her sister Corinne, are deeply scarred and traumatized by all of the deaths in their family, leaving most of the women widows before their time. I felt bad for poor Corinne and her paranoia over something bad happening to her husband or her child. She was in dire need of therapy.

**"Sit. Calm down." He goes to the cupboard, takes down my favorite mug and pours me a cuppa joe. "I called the bakery a while ago, told Iris you were sick last night and needed the day off."**  
**"Oh." I pause. "How many times have they called since then?"**  
**"Four. Iris is wondering if you have Lou Gehrig's disease. Rose thinks it sounds more like cancer. Your mom said feel better, she'll see you tomorrow."**

After Corinne gives birth, Lucy decides that maybe it's time to start dating again so she can have a family of

her own. Before she can do this, though, she needs to first break the news to her deceased husband's family, particularly her former brother-in-law, Ethan, who has been her rock since Jimmy's death.

**"Right. Um...well, here's the thing, Ethan. You know that Corinne had a baby, of course. And it got me thinking that, well..."** I clear my throat. **"Well, I'd like to have a baby, too."**

**Gah! This isn't coming out the way I want it to.**

**His right eyebrow raises. "Really."**

**"Yeah. I've always wanted kids. You know. So, um..."** Why am I so nervous? It's just Ethan. He'll understand. **"So I guess I'm ready to...start dating. I want to get married again. Have a family."**

**Ethan leans forward, causing Fat Mikey to jump off his lap. "I see," he says.**

**I look at the floor for a second. "Right."** Risking a peek at Ethan, I add, **"So we should probably stop sleeping together."**

To say I was gobsmacked at this revaluation would be a huge understatement, particularly since Lucy and Ethan's past hadn't been revealed yet. Kristan Higgins is such a great storytelling. I loved the way this story unfolded. I loved Ethan so much. He's been one of my favourite heroes by Kristan that I have read about so far.

So why was this only a 4 star read for me? Well.... Lucy. As much as my heart broke for her over her loss and inability to put herself out there, as the book went on, I moved from sympathy to annoyance to aggravation. I suppose, given her "support system", the Black Widows, I shouldn't be surprised that she wasn't guided towards therapy so that she dealt properly with her grief. I understood her reasons for pushing love away, but the more she hurt Ethan to self preserve, the more my sympathy dwindled. I felt bad for Ethan and as the book moved on, my desire for Ethan and Lucy to get together started going away.

Despite this, I loved this book. Like Ethan, I forgave Lucy and found the ending very satisfying.

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### **Suzie Quint says**

At 400 pages, this book is 100 pages too long. There are some fun things in this book but the heroine wallowed too much in the grief of being widowed. She was so blind to the hero's love that she was cruel to him. And selfish? Oh, man. Even at the end where she finally realized she wanted him, she had to tell him on her timetable. The hero was either a saint or a doormat, depending on how you want to see him. She walked all over him enough for me to vote for the latter. What gripes me the most is that the author clearly knew this because a couple of secondary characters come right out and say it as when Parker tells the heroine that she (the heroine) likes hurting the hero and has been hurting him for years. Talk about dysfunctional, codependent relationships.

I just don't think I want to read any more from this author.

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### **Melissa says**

Kristan Higgins has done it AGAIN. Seriously though—and I hope this doesn't come back to bite me—it's not like I had any doubts, she's become one of my favorites for a reason. Through this easy to adore cast, with varying views of the world, Kristan Higgins delivers a host of emotions—utter heartbreak, longing and even a touch of giddiness, to name just a few—all while driving home the notion that happiness can be found in the most unexpected places, if you open yourself up to the possibility.

It's the arrival of Lucy's precious little niece that sparks something in her. After five years of wallowing in her grief—incessantly watching and re-watching her wedding video, avoiding the taste of her own handcrafted desserts and constantly reminiscing about what could have been—she's ready to let her dead husband go. She's determined to find a guy she can love just a little bit, nothing even remotely close to the crazy-intense feelings she shared with Jimmy. Someone safe, predictable and ready to start a family. The obstacles Lucy has to tackle first—breaking the news to her former in-laws, along with the 'Black Widows', and cutting off the 'friends-with-benefits' situation she has going on with Ethan. Have I mentioned, he's her former brother-in-law?

I know, I know. On the surface, Ethan and Lucy together sounds like a messy, taboo or even awkward situation in many ways, but believe me when I say, their relationship proves to be so much *more* than meets the eye. If you're anything like I was, you'll find yourself exhaling a resounding "awwwwww" or putting your hand over your heart as the *reality* of how things came to be unfolds in a startling way.

**"Check the toast."**

Like all of Kristan Higgins' stories, this one tugs on the heartstrings, but still manages to bring a healthy dose of humor. The 'Black Widows', a zany group of old ladies, made up of Lucy's widowed aunts and mother, provide a ton of comic relief along the way and add an interesting dynamic to the storyline with their life lessons. It was Ethan's playful and cutesy flirting during happy hour with the old broads that initially made me fall for him, but it was *everything* else that proved Lucy would be a lucky, lucky woman to end up with him. Why in the heck did it take her so long to figure that out? That was probably my one and only contention with the story—the number of times Lucy wavered in her decision.

So, if you've read any of this author's books, you know she has a penchant for working a loveable dog into the storyline, but not this time. I know it's silly, but the crazy cat lady in me was over the moon that *finally* the feline population was represented. Fat Mikey, might have been a complete curmudgeon, but he sure stole my heart with his moody ways. Meow. =^..^=

I feel like I've said this a hundred times already—okay, not literally—but if you enjoy a great mix of romance and women's fiction, pick up a Kristan Higgins book or put on your headphones and listen to the audio version. I've been doing a combination of both, as I make my way through her extensive backlist, and it's proven to be a fun experience. I'm not sure I've ever been so motivated to clean my house or if traffic has ever felt as tolerable as does when I'm listening to Xe Sands (amazing narrator, by the way!) bring this author's words and characters to life.

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**♥Sharon♥ says**

It is safe to say that Kristan Higgins has become one of my go to authors when I am in the mood for a sweet, funny and emotional romantic read. I enjoyed this one.

But I have to be honest, it took a while for Lucy to grow on me. I understood why she was hesitant with her love life but her wishy washy behavior drove me batty at times.

Now Ethan, well he was just wonderful. What a sweetheart. I loved how he treated Lucy with such tenderness and kindness. Even when his heart was being bruised he was always there for her.

All and all this was another sweet love story. The ending was done in true KH form....LOVED IT! And the Epilogue could not have been any more perfect. ❤

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### **KatLynne says**

There are things about this story I liked, but unfortunately, there are more things that didn't work for me.

KH is an intelligent writer and I never have a problem with the way her stories flow. This one was written in first person POV and I have no problem with that. I liked the setting and I enjoyed that it involved bakeries, cooking, chefs, etc. I like that there is always humor in her books as well as decent character development. This book had all that.

Unfortunately, by the middle, I was gnashing my teeth and found myself wanting to shake the heroine. It's been nearly six years since she lost her husband and her whining the entire time was tiring. I couldn't rise above it and I felt the hero would have been much better off running!

Ethan is the shining star here. He does get a HEA and there's an epilogue as well. This is another for my shelf, "everyone loved but me."

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### **Sharon says**

Ohmygosh this book is so cringeworthy. This girl is a fuckin' mess. I can't. She's just... The. Worst.

I enjoyed the 1st book, but this was honestly disappointing. I liked the ending, but everything else was just not my cup of tea.

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