



The Dakota Winters

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An evocative and wildly absorbing novel about the Winters, a family living in New York City's famed Dakota apartment building in the year leading up to John Lennon's assassination

It's the fall of 1979 in New York City when twenty-three-year-old Anton Winter, back from the Peace Corps and on the mend from a nasty bout of malaria, returns to his childhood home in the Dakota. Anton's father, the famous late-night host Buddy Winter, is there to greet him, himself recovering from a breakdown. Before long, Anton is swept up in an effort to reignite Buddy's stalled career, a mission that takes him from the gritty streets of New York, to the slopes of the Lake Placid Olympics, to the Hollywood Hills, to the blue waters of the Bermuda Triangle, and brings him into close quarters with the likes of Johnny Carson, Ted and Joan Kennedy, and a seagoing John Lennon.

But the more Anton finds himself enmeshed in his father's professional and spiritual reinvention, the more he questions his own path, and fissures in the Winter family begin to threaten their close bond. By turns hilarious and poignant, *The Dakota Winters* is a family saga, a page-turning social novel, and a tale of a critical moment in the history of New York City and the country at large.

The Dakota Winters Details

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From Reader Review *The Dakota Winters* for online ebook

Tripfiction says

Novel set in and around the Dakota Building NEW YORK 1980

Tom Barbash's latest novel focuses on a difficult period for the Winters, a family who live in the Dakota, an apartment block in Upper West Side, New York – hence the title.

The Dakota, famously the setting for the film *Rosemary's Baby* and the apartment block outside which John Lennon was shot, is where Anton Winter, aged 23, returns following a stint with the Peace Corps. Anton has contracted malaria and comes home to convalesce. His father, the celebrated talk-show host Buddy Winter, is also at home recovering from a nervous breakdown which culminated in him walking out of his live show, a form of professional suicide from which he seems unlikely to recover. Anton's mother is busy helping Teddy Kennedy's campaign, Kip, Anton's younger brother, is at school and his sister Rachel has moved out so Anton and Buddy find themselves at a loose end together and Anton takes on the task of restarting his father's career. When he's not engineering Buddy's comeback, Anton busies himself working as a busboy at a restaurant in Central Park, goes off on a sailing trip with John Lennon (John and Yoko are neighbours and friends with Buddy's parents) and starts a romance with an English journalist.

The Dakota Winters is a tour de force in terms of re-creating time and place. The novel is packed with references to specific events and peopled with a host of actors, rock stars, politicians and generally anyone who featured on famous talk shows in this period. New York in 1980 is brilliantly evoked as Anton takes the reader to the fashionable bars and restaurants of the period, making for a very interesting and entertaining read. But, of course, as we follow Anton through the year and witness his recovery and the increasing likelihood of Buddy's successful comeback, it is impossible to forget that we are heading towards December and the fate that awaits John Lennon.

Anton's relationship with his father is central to the novel and holds the reader's attention when they might otherwise have been overwhelmed by the avalanche of celebrity gossip. Anton grew up very much in the shadow of his father's fame and has made it his mission to know more about Buddy and his career than anyone else. At the beginning of the novel Anton's personality is subsumed by Buddy's greater persona; Buddy even steals Anton's Peace Corps stories, but as the story develops and as Buddy comes to rely more and more on Anton to fix his career, the roles reverse. As a child, Anton was taught to swim by Buddy's rather brutal method of chucking the child in the ocean and telling him to blow bubbles as he struggled to shore. At the end of the novel, as Anton launches Buddy into a new career, "Here you go, Buddy Boy, now swim, swim!", he feels like a parent dropping their kid at college and then heading off to get on with their own life.

As Anton finally breaks free from his brilliantly clever, but needy father and goes off to make his own career, the dreaded event of the assassination of John Lennon occurs and the reader is left pondering the ephemeral nature of fame and fortune.

The Dakota Winters is not without flaws but it is packed with interesting anecdotes and a plethora of entertaining characters and its portrayal of a difficult father-son relationship gradually evolving into something solid and lasting makes it worth reading.

Amy says

A 3.5 rounded up.

I really enjoyed *The Dakota Winters*. Anton Winters, has returned from working at Peace Corps after contracting Malaria. His famous father, Buddy Winters, is keen to revive his career after walking off the set of his own talk show and suffering from a breakdown. The family are adjusting to life with Buddy off the air while residing in their home in the Dakota - an prestigious apartment block in New York City that also houses John Lennon and Yoko Ono. Desperate to get his career back on track, Buddy enlists the help of Anton to help get him the big break he needs to return to TV.

The book is told in three different chunks - Anton assisting Buddy in returning to television, spending time sailing with John Lennon and the aftermath of JL's death.

The book was told from the perspective of Anton. He was a loveable character who I grew so fond of as the pages went by. The book included so many historical references and snippets of celebrities that I found very interesting and added glamour to the story. I enjoyed learning more about the Winters dynamic and my favourite part of the book was the journey to get Buddy back on TV. I found him to be an incredibly charming character that you just couldn't help but like. I was hopeful for a comeback throughout.

I'm a big Beatles fan but I found the two parts involving John Lennon to be a bit of a drag. I did enjoy them both but personally preferred the sole focus on the Winters family.

It was a great, quick read and I enjoyed the book despite not enjoying the parts of the story equally as much as the others. It was well written, featured two very loveable standout characters and the sprinkles of celebrities/historical references helped bring the book to life.

Thanks to netgalley for an ARC copy of this book.

Larry H says

3.5 stars.

Imagine what it must be like to have a famous father, and to play a role in his fame. Imagine what it's like to be so enmeshed in his situation that you're not sure where his path ends and yours begins, or how to separate the two.

That describes Anton Winter's life pretty perfectly. His father, Buddy, was a famous late-night talk show host, and for years Anton, his mother, and his siblings played parts in many of the sketches his father did.

As Anton got older, he played a more crucial role in the show, running through Buddy's monologue with

him, prepping him regarding his various guests, and prepping the celebrity and non-celebrity guests as well. And then one night, Buddy had a bit of a nervous breakdown and flamed out, and disappeared for a while.

Finding himself at loose ends, Anton goes to Gabon with the Peace Corps for 10 months, and returns home after a particularly bad bout of malaria, which nearly killed him. It's January of 1980, and he returns to his family's apartment in the Dakota, the legendary complex in New York City. The city, and the country, are on edge, with crime in the city on the rise again, the Iranian hostage crisis, and presidential politics heating up.

While there's tumult around them, Buddy is back to his old self, if not better and stronger. He is a more present figure in the lives of his family for the first time in a long while, and the stability feels like the return of an old friend. But Buddy is longing to get back into show business, and Anton wants to help get him there. It's not long before Anton is becoming his emissary, trying to find an angle to get him a place in front of the public he misses so much.

As Anton works to find Buddy's next opportunity, he's trying to decide what's next for him as well. He fills his nights working as a busboy at a fancy restaurant, and he spends time getting closer with one of his father's close friends and their neighbor in the Dakota, John Lennon. What John wants more than anything is to learn how to sail, and Anton is able to teach him, and bring the singer peace amidst the demands of fans for more music.

The Dakota Winters was a really fascinating read, full of the complicated, interdependent relationships among family members who try to make another's dream happen. There are lots of show business-related tidbits, and the book had a real you-are-there feel for different places and moments in history, like the 1980 Winter Olympics and some rallies for Ted Kennedy during his bid for the Democratic presidential nomination.

I really enjoyed the characters in this book, although Anton and Buddy were the most vividly drawn of all. I also found the scenes with John Lennon pretty fascinating, and while this is a work of fiction, his personality seemed very much in keeping with what I've read about him in the year prior to his death. I've never read anything that Tom Barbash has written before, but he definitely has a knack for telling a great story.

The pacing was a bit slower than I would have liked—I felt like the book was moving toward a few inevitable conclusions, and it took a little longer to get there. I also found the transition to the epilogue of sorts to be kind of abrupt, and given how much I became attached to the characters, I felt a little gypped by that. But none of these issues were insurmountable, and there's so much to enjoy about this book.

I joke sometimes that when I think "40 years ago," I think of the 1960s, but crazily enough 1979 will be 40 years ago next year. (Next week, actually.) *The Dakota Winters* is a great snapshot of that time, and a great family story.

See all of my reviews at itseithersadnessoreuphoria.blogspot.com.

Beth says

Unexpectedly lovely. This snagged me because of the narrator's voice--it read almost like memoir. For some reason it kept reminding me of Ward Just's *An Unfinished Season*, even though I read that book ages ago and hardly remember it. It also paired bizarrely well with *The Buddha of Suburbia*, another bildungsroman from

a completely different perspective.

Emily says

I may need to give up on historical fiction - I think it just isn't for me. The Dakota Winters has a synopsis that caught my attention, but I struggled to maintain focus. It's very slow-paced with a lot of chatting and name-dropping.

I think that this would be a good fit for the right reader. I was expecting drama, and it's lacking in that area. If you're a historical fiction fan, and are particularly interested in New York in the 70s, check this one out.

Patty Shlonsky says

“The Dakota Winters” is a story of historical fame and privilege, told through the eyes of Anton Winter. Anton is the son of Buddy Winter, a famous talk show host who is attempting a comeback after having a breakdown on his own show and simply walking out. The Winter family lives in the famous Dakota, a cooperative apartment building in New York City, where parts of *Rosemary’s Baby* was filmed.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono lived in the Dakota and they play a significant part in Anton’s story. At the beginning of the book Anton has returned from Gabon on the West Coast of Central Africa, where he almost dies from malaria and a variety of other maladies. He is convalescing at his parent’s apartment in the Dakota. We learn that Anton has a sister, Rachel, who finds the whole fame and fortune thing an inconvenience, and brother, Kip, who is a great (but not great enough) tennis player. Kip and Rachel are really just side stories.

The Winter family live a privileged life although money is running out since Buddy walked off his talk show. Anton’s mother had been an accomplished actress and when we meet her she is helping Joan Kennedy with Ted Kennedy’s presidential race.

The family takes a trip to Lake Placid for the Winter Olympics and the efforts to get Buddy back on television begin in earnest. Throughout this process we learn how dependent Buddy is on his son—for his material, his connections and intense moral support. Anton has issues with this dependence.

The book has three pieces—getting Buddy back on television, Anton’s relationship with John Lennon and the death of John Lennon. All three are wrapped up together.

Anton and John become friends and John invites Anton to join him on a cruise on his boat to Bermuda. During the journey the boat is hit by a storm that they almost do not survive. John and Anton become close from the experience.

Finally, Buddy gets a new talk show, a once a week event on Friday nights. The show is precarious and Anton is in the process of getting John, Paul, Ringo and George together on the show (everyone has agreed except George), when John is killed. Everything speeds up from there.

The book is well written and the historical references interspersed throughout are interesting. I really enjoyed the portions focused on John Lennon and the Beatles, but I found Anton’s angst over wealth and privilege

annoying. At one point he comments that “Being famous seemed like a curse, something you couldn’t escape. It followed you everywhere and you could never decide to suddenly be anonymous.”

The thing you get from the book is that absolutely everyone, regardless of fame, fortune or position, has problems and personal issues, but in Anton’s story, those problems and issues seem to me indulgent and unsympathetic. The angst Anton describes revolves around a life of luxury, where the characters never worry about having a roof over their heads or a glass of Dom Perignon in their hands, but seem to worry over the emptiness and potential loss of privilege. This was not my favorite book but I think others less cynical will enjoy the story. if you like this review you can read more by subscribing to www.frombriefstobooks.com

Susan says

Anton Winter has just returned to New York, at the beginning of this novel. He has been in Africa, with the Peace Corps, but a bout of malaria has left him needing to recuperate. Anton’s father, Buddy, is a late night chat show host, who is recovering from a break-down, after walking off the set of his show one night and out of a job. Anton’s mother was an actress and spends much of her time helping Joan Kennedy with Ted Kennedy’s Presidential race. Brother Kip plays tennis and his sister, Rachel, is heavily involved in a romance with a police officer.

It is 1980 and Anton, and his family, live in the Dakota. Over the course of a year, we follow his attempts to help his father find a new show, while he tries to both resist the pull of his father’s need for his help and yet find himself attracted by his celebrity orbit. Of course, there is another man living in the Dakota that year, whose career, having been dormant for a few years, is about to reignite with tragic consequences. It is important to state that this is not a novel about John Lennon, but he does appear in this novel; notably when Anton goes on a sailing trip with him.

I found this a moving and interesting personal read and I think it would be a good choice for reading groups. As well as having an interesting storyline, and characters, the author makes both New York, and the Dakota itself, come alive. Obviously, we, as readers, do know what is coming, as we near the end, and it was difficult for me, as a Beatles fan, to read. Still, the author did create a John Lennon that I recognised, being fair in his depiction and mixing the real characters, with the fictional, very well indeed. I am sure that I will read this novel again and that I will explore by this author. I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

I was just little over a year old when John Lennon was killed, and writing this review is it just days after the 38 anniversary of his death. And, this story was extra poignant when you think about how much John Lennon had left to give when his life was cut short. This is a fictional story, but Tom Barbash writes in a way that makes it all feel real. Like Anton, his father Buddy and the rest of the family really existed. Cudos to Barbash to make fictional characters come to life.

I loved reading a story set in New York 79/80. I'm too young to remember those years, but nevertheless, it made me nostalgic. And, letting Dakota, one of the most iconic buildings in the city be the central point was a great move. I loved getting to know Anton and Buddy. To follow them as Anton tries to help his father return to the limelight as well as trying to find his own place outside his father's shadow. There is so much going on the world, the Olympics, Ted Kennedy's campaign. I really, really loved Joan Kennedy part in this story. As the saying goes, "behind every successful man there's a woman". And, Joan really showed in this story how to rise above Ted's infidelities. Not to mention standing by Ted, despite the Chappaquiddick incident that in the end ruined his political ambitions.

There is so much going in this book. I first gave the book four stars. However, when I started to write this review did I start to think about how much I enjoyed this story. And, how sad I was to have to say goodbye to Anton and the rest of the characters at the end of the book. So, I raised the rating to five stars. I warmly recommend this book!

I want to thank the publisher for providing me with a free copy through NetGalley for an honest review!

SueKich says

Please please me, oh yeah.

"There was an unwritten code in the Dakota that you made nothing of people's celebrity and you treated everyone simply as neighbours, and for the most part we did."

Not, as you might suppose, a bleak seasonal tale set in the American Midwest but the story of the Winter family living in Manhattan's fabled Dakota building in the mid-seventies. The Dakota was home to John Lennon and Yoko Ono in 1979, the year before Lennon was killed, and the inevitable outcome of this appealing novel gives it an interesting edge. Yet at no point does the author overplay his hand; such limited foreshadowing as Tom Barbash allows himself is handled with the utmost subtlety and is more the writer's reflection of the city's tense urban scene during that era.

Twenty-three year old narrator Anton, has returned home from the Peace Corps in Gabon to recover from a severe bout of malaria. Two years previously, his father Buddy Winter, a popular and well-respected chat-show host, had a meltdown live on television. Buddy is now itching to get back on the box and wants his son to help him but Anton has always felt ambivalent about living life in his father's shadow. When Dakota neighbour John Lennon asks Anton to teach him how to sail, Anton can see the possibility of another life, and even though he's been brought up surrounded by celebrities, even *he* feels star-struck. Well, who wouldn't be?

Tom Barbash deftly interweaves his fictional story with true-life luminaries from Leonard Bernstein to Teddy Kennedy and tells this great story about Lauren Bacall on Buddy's chat-show *"as she excoriated Frank Sinatra, who romanced her after Bogart died, and eventually proposed but told her, she said, not to tell anyone. At a black-tie event she told a friend in confidence, who managed to whisper it to Swifty Lazar, who that night wrote about it in the Examiner. She called Sinatra after the story ran, and he told her what was done was done, but they'd have to 'lay low' for the time being.*

'It's like you robbed a bank.'

'In his eyes I had.'

'Then what happened?' Buddy said.

*'Oh,' she said. 'Well, he never spoke to me again after that.' Someone gasped.
'He'll get his,' Buddy said. 'Time wounds all heels.'"*

Other than Lennon's voice (which didn't quite ring true to me) there is so much to admire and enjoy here. Tom Barbash has a remarkably light touch and can bring forth human insights as well as wry humour without ever losing sight of his tender underlying story of a father and a son, as well as the penalties of extreme fame and the rewards that may – or may not – be worth it.

My grateful thanks to Simon & Schuster UK for the review copy courtesy of NetGalley.

Chris Roberts says

The whole of verbalized human interaction,
is a redundancy of self-predicated absurdity,
constantly articulated, time-time, again-again.

What 1979?

NYC, 1977, crazier summer blackout,
Son of Sam, graffiti tagged subway trains,
get mugged, repeat, Studio 54, cocaine.

Setting. The whole country hates New York City.

NYC, true to the cankering state that holds it,
is peopled with besotted, semi-beings,
who skulk the filthy streets trench-footed.

#poems

Chris Roberts, God Today

Jill says

Halfway through *The Dakota Winters*, I stopped momentarily and asked myself: what is the key story here? Is it the story of the narrator Anton, who is in danger of being overshadowed by his charismatic and damaged by his late-night talk show host father, Buddy Winters? Or is it a homage to his neighbor and friend, John Lennon (yes, THAT John Lennon) who also lives at the Dakota?

Tom Barbash wants the book to do both, but ultimately, I'm not sure it did. The excellence of the book comes from capturing a slice of time – 1970s New York on the upper west side – and there are scores of titillating tidbits about the many celebrities that frequented Buddy's talk show and, of course, tidbits about John Lennon. As far as the former, I didn't think the father-son story was developed with as many nuances as I had hoped for. Mr. Barbash wimps out a bit in delving deeply into his characters' psyches. We see them

interact together but I never viscerally sensed the emotional pain that threaded the relationship.

John Lennon comes across as curiously flat. At a time when he was going through primal scream and all the fallout of his marriage to Yoko, I didn't quite buy his role as a compassionate and wizened "older brother" to Anton. There is a long subplot about John taking up sailing (with Anton and Captain Hank Halsted, his real life "sailing captain." Again, the many psychological struggles that Lennon was coping with during that turbulent time are not delineated or explored in any depth.

Granted, this is a fun book to read. Everyone from Teddy and Joan Kennedy to Johnny Carson make their appearance and it was fascinating to read about the iconic Dakota building. But at the end of the day, it felt a little bit like a frothy dessert – good while I was partaking but less than satisfying as I got to the last, inevitable bite.

Kasa Cotugno says

This is one of my least favorite genres, fictionalized biography. However, I have a special affection for the time span, 1979-80, particularly since I spent much time then in NYC, in love with the worn glamor of the upper west side. Tom Barbash writes well of that era, that place. I remember some of his short stories that evoked the same emotions. What I felt was less successful was the personalized interaction with John Lennon and his son Sean (Yoko mostly offstage), and the Ted Kennedys. The story of Anton, the protagonist, was more compelling, as he tries to overcome both his tropical diseases incurred while serving in the Peace Corps, and to help his downward spiraling father regain his foothold as a popular late night talk host who is probably a combination of Jack Paar and Dick Cavett. It's a late coming of age in a New York that doesn't exist any more.

Tammy says

In 1979, Anton, the son of a late night talk show host returns from Africa to his family home at the Dakota to recover from Malaria. Prior to his stint in the Peace Corps, his depressed father detonates his career by walking off the set mid-show and travels to parts unknown to find himself. He has returned by the time Anton comes home and the novel focuses on a family revolving around a talented father attempting to make a come-back. John Lennon makes an appearance as do other celebrities of the time. I was charmed, nostalgic for a NYC that no longer exists and I fell a little in love with affable, lost and delightful Anton.

Sarah says

Anton Winter is the son of a chat show host who has had a spectacular, and very public, breakdown. He narrates the tale of his father rehabilitation alongside that of the Dakota building's most famous resident, John Lennon. Both men are taking a break from their public personas and are both struggling to find their way back to their place in the limelight.

I enjoyed the story of Buddy the chat show host, as well as the more personal side of John Lennon. Where it

fell down for me was when the writing style turned factual; listing names, incidents, obscure Beatles facts and television network personalities. I felt the book went from being a touching story about a father and son, to a strange Beatles fanbook.

Gary Branson says

Really enjoyed up to the non-existent ending. At times there needed to be a better setup for scenes that were heavy on the dialog.
