

## Are You Happy Now?

by Richard Babcock

John Lincoln is a thirty-three year old book editor at a minor Chicago publishing house, which was established as a vanity for its owner, Byron Duddleston. Despite being an English major in College, Duddleston went into commodities trading, a very big thing in Chicago, and made a motza over 20 years until his mid-life crisis hit. Then he decided he wanted to set up his own publishing business, which only deals in non-fiction usually related to Chicago and surrounding areas. John Lincoln is his chief editor and has been cynical and hypercritical for so long that he no longer recognises it in himself, although others clearly do. He wants things yet seems incapable or unwilling to change any part of his life to get them though he does not see it that way. He feels like a victim because he has not achieved the glittering success working with 'real' writers in New York, which he believes is his due.

His marriage falls apart and he starts losing it at work. He gets a new assistant, a recent graduate of his frequently maligned alma mater, the University of Chicago. Amy O'Malley has literary talent and a good story based on her experience of research into human sexuality while at University. Sex sells after all. Lincoln decides his editorial skills will propel Amy to become the best-selling author he needs so badly if he is to make the big time. The rest of the book just proves you are never too old to grow up.

Sadly, for Lincoln, things do not proceed as he hoped. Indeed, the plot meanders along in a relatively entertaining way without much happening. Most developments take a long time to be completed for reasons I do not understand. Lincoln is not an admirable guy in any way but, oddly enough, I was still keen to see him succeed. By the end, his life seems to have changed dramatically yet nothing has changed about him at all.

The book contains many funny anecdotes and elucidates the multitude of unremarkable things in life that make us happy even if we don't realise it. Basically what happens is: life! Although I agree that is true, I wanted more, rather like the protagonist. I found the book easy to read it to the end but I felt let down once I had finished. Maybe that was the point.

The author has worked as an editor for many years and has published a couple of novels before. He is obviously an accomplished writer himself always careful of excess verbiage. There were no great literary pretensions, which is probably what made it easy to read but kept me wondering why Babcock bothered.

Three stars

Robert Hitchins March 2013

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