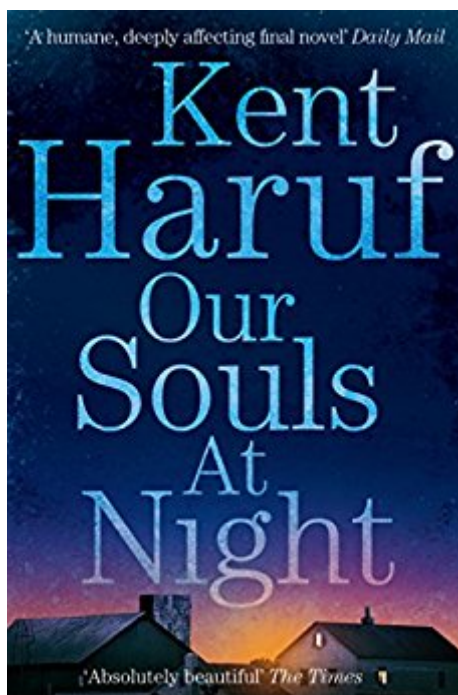


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Our Souls At Night



Synopsis

From the Folio Prize-shortlisted author of Plainsong, Eventide and Benediction, a stunning novel about finding happiness. SOON TO BE A MOTION PICTURE "Absolutely beautiful" The Times "Gripping and tender" Publishers Weekly This is a love story. A story about growing old with grace. Addie Moore and Louis Waters have been neighbours for years. Now they both live alone, their houses empty of family, their quiet nights solitary. Then one evening Addie pays Louis a visit. Their brave adventures form the beating heart of *Our Souls at Night*, Kent Haruf's exquisite final novel. MORE PRAISE FOR OUR SOULS AT NIGHT "Luminous" Ursula K Le Guin, Guardian "I loved Kent Haruf's small-town love story" David Nicholls "A delicate, sneakily devastating evocation of place and character . . . Haruf's story accumulates resonance through carefully chosen details; the novel is quiet but never complacent" New Yorker "Short, spare and moving" Wall Street Journal "Gritty, painful and human . . . Haruf's final novel is a beacon of hope; he is sorely missed" Financial Times

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Customer Reviews

About eight years ago I read "Plainsong" and I was thunderstruck. It was so good I immediately turned to "Eventide", which was almost as powerful and affecting. I eagerly went on to one of Haruf's earlier novels, "Where You Once Belonged", but it was merely average and I figured that I had reached the end of the road with Kent Haruf. But from beyond the grave (he died last November) Haruf reaches out with OUR SOULS AT NIGHT. This valedictory novel is on the same elevated plane as "Plainsong" and "Eventide". Three exceptional novels is quite a legacy. As with his earlier novels, OUR SOULS AT NIGHT is set on the plains of eastern Colorado, in the town of Holt. The model for Holt probably is Yuma, Colorado, but in truth it is a town like many others on the High Plains. Small and rather insular, rural, everyone knows everyone else's business, conservative in politics and religion, a populace that outsiders and especially liberal urbanites might dismiss as small-minded, but with many hard-working folk, a handful of misfits, and a surprising number of basically decent, wise, but unprepossessing souls. Addie Moore and Louis Waters fall into that last category. Addie is seventy and has lived in Holt for forty-four years; she has been a widow for some time. Louis, about the same age and a widower, grew up in Holt, went away to college and to start a career, and then came back forty-six years ago. Their houses are only a block apart, but they had not known each other well. One evening Addie shows up at Louis's door and asks to talk to him. I wonder if you would consider coming to my house sometimes to sleep with me. What? How do you mean? I mean we're both alone. We've been by ourselves for too long. For years. I'm lonely. I think you might be too. I wonder if you would come and sleep in the night with me. And talk. He stared at her, watching her, curious now, cautious. You don't say anything. Have I taken your breath away? she said. I guess you have. I'm not talking about sex. I wondered. No, not sex. I'm not looking at it that way. I think I've lost any sexual impulse a long time ago. I'm talking about getting through the night. And lying warm in bed, companionably. So begins a late-in-life love affair between two souls who had resigned themselves to living out the remainder of their days rather lonely. Louis maintains his house but in the evenings he walks down the street to Addie's and the next morning he walks home again. The relationship expands, even -- after a few months -- to sex. The arrangement scandalizes some, but Louis and Addie don't care. Their children do, however, especially Addie's son Gene. And there's the rub. As trite as it might sound, OUR SOULS AT NIGHT is a beautiful story. It is not sensational, it is not edgy, it is not cynical, nor is it freighted with irony like so much modern literature. What it is, is honest. Haruf's prose is pared-down and limpid, maybe even more so than in his earlier novels. OUR SOULS AT NIGHT can be read in a single evening. If you are anything like me, it will be one of your better evenings of reading.

It takes a special writer to possess the power to touch me to the core. Kent Haruf has a way of doing that. In spare, unadorned yet poignant language, he gets right to the heart of things, capturing succinctly what makes us feel most human. This last novella-sized work, posted posthumously and written just months before his death of lung cancer at age 71, is particularly affecting. In other hands, this narrative might have been maudlin: a septuagenarian widow, Addie Moore, reaches out to her neighbor, widower Louis Waters, with a simple request: to lie together in bed, companionably, and talk in the dark to ward off the loneliness. Gradually, their lives are laid bare to each other - their dreams and disappointments, their hopes and compromises, and everything that composes the tapestry of an individual life. When Addie's young grandson, Jamie, comes to stay with Addie temporarily, their relationship both deepens and is tested. I'll say no more about the plot; it unfolds so naturally, beautifully and yet heartbreakingly that each reader must come to it on his or her own. I will say this: Kent Haruf had a way of expressing what is true and what is important. Addie says, "I just want to live simply and pay attention to what's happening each day;. And come sleep with you at night." And at another point: "I do love this physical world. I love this physical life with you. And the air and the country. The backyard, the gravel in the back alley. The grass. The cool nights. Lying in bed talking with you in the dark." The only thing to say to that is a gentle "amen." I am so sad that Kent Haruf's voice is now stilled but happy that he left his readers one last magnificent gift.

Addie Moore's husband died years ago. So did Louis Waters's wife. They live in the same town, not far from each other, in the houses they shared with their spouses for decades. They know of each other but were never friends, just neighbors who acted friendly toward each other in passing. Then one evening, just before dark, Addie shows up on Louis's porch. He invites her in and she makes a proposal to him: it's one of the oddest he's ever heard but he understands it. She wants him to come over to her house some night and sleep with her. Not for sex. For talk. Comfort. To sleep with someone else for a night, maybe more nights, but not to live with him. He's lonely too, though he's never admitted it to himself. He does it. Their relationship blossoms. They find they have a lot to talk about: their dead mates, their children, how their marriages worked out (mixed good and not as good), how neither of them wound up making of their lives what they wanted from them. Addie's son drops his son Jamie off with grandma while he goes through a rough patch: his wife has left him, his business is folding, and he may go bankrupt. Louis and Addie adjust to Jamie, help him grow. By then the

neighborhood knows of their relationship: some approve, some don't. Addie and Louis have learned one of the advantages of growing old. They don't have to care any more what other people think of their behavior. The only opinions that count are their own. That's liberating after a life of living so other people don't condemn you. Late in the book, Addie asks Louis what he thinks of their arrangement. 'I've gotten so I can stand it, he said. It feels normal now. Just normal?' 'I'm trying to have some fun with you. I know you are. Tell me the truth. The truth is I like it. I like it a lot. I'd miss it if I didn't have it. What about you?' 'I love it, she said. It's better than I had hoped for. It's a kind of mystery. I like the friendship of it. I like the time together. Being here in the dark of the night. The talking. Hearing you breathe next to me if I wake up. I like all that too. Now talk to me. Tell me something I haven't heard yet. I don't want to spoil the ending of this book. It takes an unexpected twist and isn't all happiness. But the overwhelming impression this book leaves in your mind is of simple friendship that moves into love, and of two old people who discover they're still able to learn and grow. It's beautiful. There are no verbal fireworks, no peeking inside characters' heads. Everything is observed from the outside. It's simple. Clean. Human. Haruf is like a benevolent grandfather who looks down on his creatures' antics without judging them, never condemning. (Note: Haruf was dying when he wrote this. His widow finished the editing.)

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