



I Hate to Leave This Beautiful Place

Howard Norman

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“The events of a single episode of Howard Norman’s superb memoir are both on the edge of chaos and gathered superbly into coherent meaning . . . A wise, riskily written, beautiful book.” — Michael Ondaatje

Howard Norman’s spellbinding memoir begins with a portrait, both harrowing and hilarious, of a Midwest boyhood summer working in a bookmobile, in the shadow of a grifter father and under the erotic tutelage of his brother’s girlfriend. His life story continues in places as far-flung as the Arctic, where he spends part of a decade as a translator of Inuit tales—including the story of a soapstone carver turned into a goose whose migration-time lament is “I hate to leave this beautiful place”—and in his beloved Point Reyes, California, as a student of birds. Years later, in Washington, D.C., an act of deeply felt violence occurs in the form of a murder-suicide when Norman and his wife loan their home to a poet and her young son. In Norman’s hands, life’s arresting strangeness is made into a profound, creative, and redemptive story.

“Uses the tight focus of geography to describe five unsettling periods of his life, each separated by time and subtle shifts in his narrative voice . . . The originality of his telling here is as surprising as ever.” — *Washington Post*

“These stories almost seem like tall tales themselves, but Norman renders them with a journalistic attention to detail. Amidst these bizarre experiences, he finds solace through the places he’s lived and their quirky inhabitants, human and avian.” — *The New Yorker*

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