

“Wake Up Romeo: Tips to Rekindle Your Romantic Life”by Carlos Marrero

Book Review by Alan Bennett Ilagan

Believe it or not, gay men do have long-term, loving, monogamous relationships. And those relationships, like those of our heterosexual counterparts, can run out of romantic steam. The fiery passion of first getting to know someone, the initial thrill of discovery and excitement, and the desire and stamina to have sex five times a day do eventually wane. In place of these things, something much deeper usually appears, something that has grown through time and understanding. Of course, most of us would like to keep that early spark and fire going, but it's not always easy to find the time and effort. Carlos Marrero offers some simple tips on how to do just that in his book *Wake Up Romeo: Tips to Rekindle Your Romantic Life*.

It's a refreshing notion that gay relationships have become so mundane and commonplace that some of us are living out the lives of bored, desperate housewives in need of a little romantic rekindling. That's part of what makes Marrero's work so subliminally heartwarming. The rest of it is due to his infectious optimism and hopeful outlook, along with an artistic talent that brilliantly complements his voice.

Marrero paints a giddy world steeped in vibrant color, witty flourishes and sexy, unabashed fun. Gay men did not usually get to see such scenes played out in books or television. This is the gay man's 'Leave it to Beaver' ~ a nostalgic look at what our lives might be in a perfect world. Don't worry if yours doesn't come close ~ I don't know of any straight couples who resemble this type of perfection either. Besides, Marrero owns up to the fact that his scenarios and ideas aren't always going to work out perfectly ~ it's the trying and the togetherness that will make most of his tips work best.

Playfully capturing an ideal world of romance and happiness, the book offers escapism and respite from these troubled times. There is a quaint, idyllic, 50's-like atmosphere that runs through Marrero's art - comforting and warm and reassuring. He presents everyday scenes with cute, but diverse, couples, illuminating the possibilities of romance in our day-to-day lives. His work is a celebration of gay love, and the PG-rated portraits of innocence and sexy fun are at odds with the salacious porn-tinged art that often comprises the gay art scene.

Marrero offers a revitalizing and promising look at gay romance that should appeal equally to both the burgeoning teen and the jaded octogenarian. Though these portraits of perfection are slightly exaggerated, and some scenarios somewhat impractical, Marrero's heart is in the right place, and his art has never found a happier marriage than to the romantic issues at hand. *Wake Up Romeo* may be the perfect Valentine's Day present for someone you know, or would like to know better, and a touching gift for those couples who think they know each other well enough.