

## What Happens Next?: Matters of Life and Death

From the PEN/New England Book Award citation:

Douglas Bauer's memoir-in-essays is a riveting meditation on death and dying and an exhilarating and joyous illumination of what it means to have curiosity and spirit . . . And, seen in this light, the question posed by the book's deceptively simple title takes on added gravitas: reading these hauntingly beautiful pages, readers may well find themselves pondering the consequences of American restlessness.

From one of the book's essays, "The Life He Left Her":

Sometimes, thinking about [my parents'] marriage, I've remembered Willa Cather's great novella, *My Mortal Enemy*, where Myra Henshawe is filled with bitter resentment that her long marriage has not continued the unsustainably romantic moment that began it. Dying, she's asked why she's treated her husband so severely, and she replies, "Perhaps I can't forgive him for the harm I did him."

Perhaps my mother forgave my father for the harm she did him. Perhaps, that is, she came to see that the person she was as a wife contributed vitally to his deceit. Which would mean, of course – and I very much hope this was true – that she was then able to forgive herself.