



Starlight

Richard Wagamese

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The final novel from Richard Wagamese, the bestselling and beloved author of *Indian Horse* and *Medicine Walk*, centres on an abused woman on the run who finds refuge on a farm owned by an Indigenous man with wounds of his own. A profoundly moving novel about the redemptive power of love, mercy, and compassion--and the land's ability to heal us.

Frank Starlight has long settled into a quiet life working his remote farm, but his contemplative existence comes to an abrupt end with the arrival of Emmy, who has committed a desperate act so she and her child can escape a harrowing life of violence. Starlight takes in Emmy and her daughter to help them get back on their feet, and this accidental family eventually grows into a real one. But Emmy's abusive ex isn't content to just let her go. He wants revenge and is determined to hunt her down.

Starlight was unfinished at the time of Richard Wagamese's death, yet every page radiates with his masterful storytelling, intense humanism, and insights that are as hard-earned as they are beautiful. With astonishing scenes set in the rugged backcountry of the B.C. Interior, and characters whose scars cut deep even as their journey toward healing and forgiveness lifts us, *Starlight* is a last gift to readers from a writer who believed in the power of stories to save us.

Starlight Details

Date : Published August 14th 2018 by McClelland & Stewart

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Author : Richard Wagamese

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From Reader Review Starlight for online ebook

Leeanne says

I can't say enough of Richard Wagamese's talent as an author. In a lot of ways, he has spoiled me for any other. His prose, story development, descriptive writing are second to none. He is so missed.

The book Starlight is a continuation of Medicine Walk which in itself is a treat. The story flows with a life of its own, bringing in broken characters with need of healing. A wonderful story of growth and hope. I highly recommend it.

Alice says

Such a heartwarming read. I wanted it to go on and on. Friendship, love, understanding and respect. It was everything I expected in a book by Richard Wagamese. We've lost a great writer far too soon.

Krista says

For Starlight the farm was his heritage and culture, the plainspoken earnestness of his neighbours all the language he needed, and the feel of the land beneath his feet all the philosophy and worldview that fed his sense of purpose. A night sky brimmed with stars, the snap and crackle of a fire behind him in the darkness, and the howls of wolves on distant ridges were all the spirituality he'd ever needed. He was not displaced or dispossessed. He was home. In that, he felt keenly alive.

It's almost unfair to give a rating to an unfinished novel – Starlight does come off as a first draft, but with some very lovely passages that were probably exactly what Richard Wagamese would have sent out into the world had he not passed away while writing this – so while I'm pleased that this was polished up enough to release (and appreciate the material included at the end that points to how Wagamese wanted to tie everything up), as it is, this isn't really up to Wagamese's standard and I'm going to weasel out with a noncommittal three stars.

After a brief scene that reintroduces Frank Starlight from Medicine Walk, we meet a woman and her young daughter as they escape from the violent drunkard that they have been living with. Emmy and Winnie drive a stolen truck deep into the backcountry of British Columbia, hoping to become lost enough before they run out of gas, and end up in the small town near where Starlight and his handyman, Roth, are now working the old man's farm. There are many scenes of the two men doing hard and honest labour, and this sets up a steady rhythm in contrast with Emmy and her daughter's desperate flight:

They were weathered men. Their clothes were the tough and simple fabric of the farm, the

field, the wilderness, and they stood together in that hushed silence, smoking and considering nothing but the gathered evidence of their industry. Above them the congress of stars pinwheeled slowly and a knife slice of moon hung over everything like a random thought. They could hear the sides of cattle shunted against the whitewashed planks of their pens and somewhere far off the skittering soliloquy of a night bird addressing all of it in plaintive, melancholic notes that rose and fell in counterpoint to their breaths, huffed with smoke. Then they nodded, each to himself, and turned in concert and began the slow, slumped walk to the porch and the house and the rustic simplicity of a bed, a quilt, and dreams wove from the experience of passing through a day, satisfied at the scuffed and worn feel at its edges.

In a turn that was expected, but not quite believed, Starlight takes Emmy and Winnie into his home, and at the urging of a childcare worker, he and Roth take the broken pair repeatedly into the wilderness to try and make them whole again. Again, there is very lovely and moving writing about nature and humanity's role in creation, and as Starlight has become a noted wildlife photographer, there is much on the artist's role in trying to capture the wild for those who can't see for themselves (and several asides about how Starlight – half-Native but raised in a white home – resists the label of “Indigenous” photographer; an artist is an artist, and it feels like Wagamese is talking about himself here). Meanwhile, the man that Emmy ran away from, Cadotte, along with his sidekick, Anderson, have sworn to find her and have spent these months travelling from workcamp to inner city flophouse to track her down. In contrast to Starlight's steady industry, Cadotte is a nasty piece of work:

He found that he could lose himself in savagery. That thick coil of vengeance he carried in his gut could unsnake itself and take on the quality of fists and kicks and hammer blows to heads and bellies and the cracking and breaking of teeth and ribs and other bones. So that he found a grim satisfaction in pushing men to fight. In those booze-filled nights in working men's towns, such contests of will and rage were easy to start and he let the vehemence of his shattered ego rain punishment on men in ones or twos or threes. He was thrilling to watch. For such a bulky man he was light on his feet and lizard fast. He punished men. He knew precisely how hard and often to attack and hit, and he toyed with them, bloodying faces and battering knees and hips and shoulders so that in the end his adversaries became limp, defenceless rags of men who dropped at his feet eventually, and he'd raise his fists and face to the ceiling of the sky and howl in a basso keening imbued with every ounce of hate he carried for the woman he hunted unceasingly. She would be his ultimate triumph.

Like I said, I didn't quite believe the happenstance of the reclusive Starlight bringing strangers into his home (even if he is well known for helping out neighbours), and I didn't quite like that everyone is always asking this man of few words to try to describe how he finds communion with nature. On the other hand, the setup creates an interesting plotline (and especially with the violent menace tracking ever closer) and Starlight's grasping attempts to describe his processes and experiences are filled with wisdom and insight; he is obviously relaying the lessons that Wagamese wants his readers to learn. I reckon that my complaints would have been dealt with had Wagamese been able to complete (and participate in the editing process for) this book and I am still happy to have been able to read his final project, in any form.

Tina Siegel says

What a lovely parting gift.

I knew when I started 'Starlight' that it wasn't finished before Richard Wagamese passed away, and I wasn't sure I wanted to start a story with no end. Wagamese is one of my favourite writers, though, and I couldn't not read his last book. So I did.

I'm not sure it matters what 'Starlight' is about because it's filled with Wagamese's kindness and wisdom and understanding of both the harsh realities and beautiful truths of life. The characters he created, here, will make you laugh out loud and tear up. Some will inspire murderous rage. Every one feels complete and true, even if the novel isn't.

We do get a sense of how Wagamese intended 'Starlight' to end, based on another story which inspired it, an essay, and the notes he left. So it isn't entirely unfinished. Just imperfect. And, as the editors pointed out, Wagamese appreciated imperfection.

I hate knowing that he'll never write anything else. I'm going to miss Wagamese, and maybe I'll go back to his work someday. In the meantime, I think a fitting tribute would be to go out and find another Indigenous writer to enjoy. So that's what I'm going to do.

Natasha says

Richard Wagamese is such a beautiful writer. I'm so sad this book went unfinished but I think that the place where it stopped was natural.

Lotuslulu says

This is the saddest review I think I shall ever have to give because while Richard Wagamese is a gifted wordsmith and storyteller, this novel, which was published unfinished after his death, is more a first draft than a completed work. As a draft, it does not stand up to his other works in any way. It reads as a framework more than a story and in this framework there are too many problems and too little of the regular Wagamese beauty for me to believe he would have wished this to be seen by the public. It is only the final essay where he writes of finding his father that the reader can connect with the writers they know and love.

I am saddened that some will pick this book up and judge it as representative of the writer Richard Wagamese was. He was a treasure. You should read all his books. Don't let this draft shape your understanding of him. I don't recommend it. Stick to the works that Wagamese himself helped to shape into their final product.

Friederike Knabe says

Since finishing Medicine Walk and reading about Richard Wagamese's ideas for a follow up I have been

waiting in anticipation for this novel. Sadly, Richard didn't live to see STARLIGHT completed. Like many of his fans and friends, I am grateful beyond measure that his editors, publisher and family decided to publish the unfinished draft version. It is such a beautifully written, sensitive story about living and finding one's home totally within nature. It does not lack drama either. The text is complemented by additional material that helps the reader complete the novel's narrative arc.

Throughout the novel, there are, gently conveyed, lessons to be learned about our need for the beauty and serenity of the "unbroken country". For example, following a pack of wolves through the bush, Frank Starlight is moving in parallel with the animals, matching their rhythm, finally standing close, locking eyes... and shooting ... a photo... in intimate close-up. Wow! There are many scenes like this that will stay in my mind. All together they reflect a deep humanity and a search for harmony that have been part of Richard's personal journey.

Guylou says

QOTD: Have you ever read an unfinished book? How did you feel about it?

My Review:

Richard Wagamese is one of my favourite authors. His books, Indian Horse and Medicine Walk, are poetic, emotional, and moving. This beloved Canadian author passed away in 2017 and left us with his last incomplete novel called Starlight.

Starlight is the story of Frank Starlight, a phenomenal nature photographer, and Emmy, a woman who is running away from domestic violence. Emmy and her daughter take refuge with Frank and learned to communion with their natural surroundings through his teachings. Emmy and her daughter have been victims for a long time and are not out of the woods as her violent ex is on the hunt to find them and kill them.

Starlight transports its readers on a journey of healing, triumph, and serenity. Although the novel is incomplete, the author's notes provide a detailed idea on how he planned to end the book, so it is not all a loss.

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#bookaholic #reading #readersofinstagram #instaread #ilovebooks #bookaddicted #bookishcanadians
#starlight #richardwagamese #fiction

Sarah says

I went into this novel with some trepidation, knowing this unfinished sequel to Medicine Walk was the last work of Richard Wagamese. Would it be as profound as his completed and polished Indian Horse, Medicine Walk and Ragged Company? I need not have worried. There he was, right on every page. He writes characters with empathy, depth and humour. He writes of nature, setting, and the landscape of central British Columbia, with reverence. "I felt right out there. Free of measuring up, free of what other people thought I might have to be. It was wild but it had order, flow, rhythm. You could learn that if you were out there

enough. I was. It hooked me then. It hooks me now. All I ever have of Indian comes from that alone time there. That land and this land is all the ceremony I ever felt a need for. Watching the sun come up and set on it became all the prayer I ever felt a need to say. This here is my history. This here is my home. It's alive in me." Starlight is a final gift from a singular author and a special man.

Sharron says

Wagamese's final novel is a notable conclusion to the career of an amazing storyteller. This novel is both compelling and poignant, and the author weaves a story that is sure to garner much praise.

The story, which is clearly described above, falls back on themes Wagamese has explored before, home, family, redemption and love. It is through his love of the landscape of the interior of B.C. that the "lessons" he's sharing come to life. The characters here are all fractured, each carrying what could be insurmountable, and yet ultimately, they come to a place where they understand the true meaning of family and the restorative power of place.

This was a page turner of a read, and while not one that was fast, it was hard to put it down. The ending is somewhat of a question, but the journey was more than worth it.

Marg says

I came to read HIS LAST BOOK FIRST QUITE BY ACCIDENT. I had seen the movie "Indian Horse" and knew that I wanted to read some of Richard's books so I ordered a couple from the library. The first one did not arrive at the right time for me so I returned it unread, but as soon as I started reading Starlight, I was all in! Such beautiful words, such awe inspiring descriptions, such diversity of characters and lives. A truly amazing read! I cannot wait to read all of his works!

❁ Susan G says

A more fulsome review to come but I kept wanting to return to the characters after closing the book. So sad to lose this amazing storyteller.

I loved that the publisher did not try to form their own ending and added in the notes at the end of what Richard Wagamese had told his family and friends about how he was planning to end the book. RIP RW.

Mj says

Great last book written and published by one of, if not, my favourite author. Loved it. Wonderful story filled with interesting and fully formed characters and "a great deal of soul". So heartfelt. So touching. So moving. The book also had "meat and bones" and included important social issues including violence, rape, incest, homelessness, racism, the need to reach out and asked important questions about what constitutes a family, makes a man a man etcetera. It certainly makes one think. A well deserved 5 star read.

Better than any author I have read to date, I think Wagamese describes the silence, love and peace when someone is fully connected with the universe. In Starlight's aka Franklin's case (the main character), it's when he spends time in nature, soaking up the land, rivers, trees, birds, animals etc. is how he makes this connection. "Soaking up to him means using all five senses and experiencing "everything there is to see, hear, smell, touch and taste" on the land - where he feels at home. The overall result of knowing something this well is contentment, peace, love and connection with everything and everyone in the universe.

Wagamese's descriptions, as usual, are incredible. As a reader you will see, hear, smell, touch and taste along with Starlight.

The publishing of Starlight by McClelland and Stewart, a division of Penguin Random House Canada Limited is a tribute to the Wagamese, the man and the author, his writing and his person. I am hoping that the publisher has put forward Starlight as a nominated book for the 2018 Scotiabank Giller Award.

I rarely give out 5 star ratings and openly admit my favourable bias towards Wagamese. Read and savour the book yourself. See if agree that it is a wonderful 5 star read.

Wayne Inkster says

What a book. A shame we lost the writer, as his ability to draw you in was amazing.

Emmy and Winnie desperately leave a violent life. They are emotionally lost, frozen, lack trust, have no self-esteem or self-worth.

Enter Statlight. A man who doesn't need to help, but takes them in without knowing their past. He opened his house and soul and helped bring them back into life and reality.

Meanwhile, they are touching parts of his soul that even he didn't realize needed mending.

Though the book was left unfinished by the author's untimely death, the reader can draw their own ending based off of their emotions, the author's notes and where their heart and mind takes them.

Joy (joyous reads) says

I wish this didn't feel so unfinished. It was still beautiful, though and it conjures up such sublime respect for nature, its power and its beauty.
