The Borrowed Life of Frederick Fife

 Anna Johnston

If you want a feel-good laugh-out-loud book read The Borrowed Life of Frederick Fife. Frederick Fife is an 82-year-old widower who is about to be evicted from his apartment for lack of payment. As he is walking along the river side he spots an elderly man in a wheel-chair by the river with a bag of bread in his lap apparently feeding seagulls. He notices that the man is not moving and when he goes over to him he realizes the man has passed away. Frederick spots several other elderly folks from a nursing home on an outing further up the river, so he decides to wheel the deceased man up to them. As he starts to wheel the man towards the outing he is attacked by seagulls who want the bread and as Frederick swats at the gulls the wheelchair topples over sending the dead body down the bank into the river. As Frederick attempts to pull the body out of the river he slips and falls backward striking his head on a rock and the body floats away down the river along with Frederick’s coat and wallet. When the attendant notices Fred sprawled out near the river alongside the wheelchair she naturally thinks it is one of her charges named Bernard Greer. Oddly enough Fred is almost the spitting image of Bernard and is taken back to the nursing home. He does try a few times to tell the staff that he is not Bernard, but since Bernard has dementia no one takes him seriously, so Fred decides this is a good place to be as he has a bed, three meals a day, and other folks to be with.

As the days go by in the nursing home Fred starts to have an impact on the other residents and staff. Bernard was a grumpy old sort, but Fred is a gentle sort and always has a good word to say about almost everything which makes some of the residents and staff wonder what happened to Bernard on that outing to the river.

The book is full of good humor as well as poignant moments, especially with Bernard’s estranged daughter Hannah who has not seen her father in over 30 years. Fred attempts to heal the rift between her dad and herself.

This is such a good story, one that I would put up there with The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry by Rachel Joyce and The Curious Charms of Arthur Pepper by Phaedra Patrick. All of these books are worth a read.

A regular print copy of The Borrowed Life of Frederick Fife is at the Fayetteville Library and a large print copy is at Ansted Library.