



## Next of Kin

*John Boyne*

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John Boyne has been heralded as "one of the most imaginative and adventurous of the young Irish novelists working today" by the *Irish Independent*. He achieved bestseller status and won numerous awards worldwide for *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*. Now in *Next of Kin*, he steps into the drawing rooms and private clubs of the prewar English aristocracy to offer an unobstructed view of a social elite driven by the conflicting desires to uphold tradition and to acquire vast wealth.

It is 1936, and London is abuzz with gossip about the affair between Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson. But the king is not the only member of the aristocracy with a hard decision to make. Owen Montignac, the handsome and charismatic scion of a wealthy family, is anxiously awaiting the reading of his late uncle's will, for Owen has run up huge gambling debts and casino boss Nicholas Delfy has given him a choice: Find 50,000 pounds by Christmas or find yourself six feet under. So when Owen discovers that he has been cut out of the will in favor of his cousin Stella, he finds that even a royal crisis can provide the means for profit, and for murder.

*Next of Kin* vividly captures the spirit of 1930s London, revealing the secrets of the upperclass, complete with gambling, murder, an art heist, and a conspiracy to unseat the new king that could change the future of the country.

## Next of Kin Details

Date : Published August 20th 2013 by Thomas Dunne Books (first published January 1st 2006)

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Author : John Boyne

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Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Fiction, European Literature, British Literature, Mystery, Cultural, Ireland, Thriller, Abandoned, Suspense

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## From Reader Review Next of Kin for online ebook

### Jill Hutchinson says

This is the second Boyne novel that I have read....the first being "Crippen" which I liked well enough to search for a second. It has certainly gotten mixed reviews here on Goodreads.

This is a strange and rather twisted story of love, murder, and money intertwined with the King Edward VIII/Wallace Simpson (later the Duke and Duchess of Windsor) scandal. The role of that scandal, which is a bit contrived, does not become apparent until halfway through the book and it destroys more than one of the characters' lives in the process.

The murders are complex and the murderer is as complex as well. Fate steps in to save one person framed for a murder and leads to the murder of another. The murderer gets away with his sins and ends up with exactly that for which he committed the murders.....almost.

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### Graceann says

I received some excellent advice when this book was recommended to me; I was told "don't read anything about it at all." So I didn't. I went into it knowing only that there is a gentleman on the cover holding an orb. I'm very glad, because I was able to keep all the delicious surprises of this novel unspoiled.

Next of Kin is a very slow burner - it took 200 pages for me to feel invested in what was happening, but because it was going fairly quickly, I stuck with it. I'm happy I did, because when things started kicking off, there was nothing but story unfolding almost as fast as I could turn the pages.

In the interest of continuing the advice I received of "know nothing before you start reading it," I'll just say that the story starts with a funeral, and as the novel unfurls, the story reaches back into the past to help us understand how things got to where they are now, and what the various characters intend to do about it. It's as dark as pitch, often quite witty, and always interesting. I only gave four stars instead of five because of the slow start. If that had been tightened up just a tiny bit, this would have just zinged along. As it is, it's still one of my favorite reads of the year.

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### B the BookAddict says

Next of Kin by John Boyne was published in 2006 and, as usual in his books, has a subject matter unlike any other novel by the author.

Set in 1936, the protagonist, Owen Montignac, good-looking and charismatic, has run up a huge debt to casino boss Nicholas Delfy and it seems he has no hope of paying it off. At the same time, in Buckingham Palace, Edward VII seems intent on ruling England with the twice divorced American Wallis Simpson. He

has received stiff opposition from his government ministers but so far, is standing his ground. A small group of judges, the KC and advisor to the Prime Minister have convened to discuss the problem.

Owen, who has recently been cut out of his uncle's will as heir, is offered a part in a shady deal of art theft; a way out which will involve a murder that implicates the son of one of the King's advisors. The outcome of the murder trial will directly affect whether Edward will rule with Wallis as his queen or shock his nation by abdicating.

John Boyne links his fictional story to a time in England's history which had that country holding its breath. His attention to detail regarding the English throne in 1936 is faultless. The portrayal of Owen as the disinherited heir is undeniably good. While I am not normally a reader of murder mysteries, this novel totally captured my attention. 4★

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## Mark Gauld says

I am publisher and editor of the Duke & Duchess of Windsor Quarterly. I wrote the following review for our most recent issue (2-2009):

NEXT OF KIN by John Boyne is a literary thriller set in London in 1936 amidst the unfolding crisis over King Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson. This is a first rate novel that kept me in suspense every single moment and had me enthralled with its use of the abdication as its central story.

Society members who enjoy reading fiction will love this book which is a very clever story within several stories, with the abdication crisis at the center of a fascinating drama with very interesting and fully developed cast of characters. The Windsors themselves appear only once in a very brief cameo appearance.

The book's wrapper notes gives us a hint:

It is 1936, and London is abuzz with gossip about the affair between King Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson. Owen Montignac, the handsome and charismatic scion of a wealthy family, is anxiously awaiting the reading of his late uncle's will. He must pay £50,000 worth of gambling debts by Christmas or he'll soon find himself six feet under. In his desperation, he discovers that the royal scandal could provide the means for profit...and for murder.

What Boyne accomplishes, and quite impressively I might add, is to interweave various thematic messages or allegories among the various plotlines throughout the novel.

What Boyne also does quite effectively, and Society Members will be pleasantly surprised, is portray the abdication crisis and all of the various facets of public and private opinion of all classes of British Society. Mr. Boyne has obviously read some informative books about King Edward VIII. Even though this is a work of fiction, I think that Mr. Boyne has accurately reflected the history of the abdication in a balanced and thoughtful way. Unlike other recent thrillers which featured a leather-wearing, whip-snapping Mrs. Simpson as a dominatrix,

NEXT OF KIN portrays both the King and Mrs. Simpson, and a few of the key government officials in an historically accurate way.

The novel involves a committee of select expert lawyers who are brought together to develop recommendations for Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin regarding handling of the abdication. Through this committee, as well as various characters in the book, we see a full spectrum of what people thought at the

time about the King's affair with Mrs. Simpson. This is historical fiction, I remind you. That genre (and several non-fiction books, in my opinion, that were written as biographies of the Windsors should be classified as historical fiction) is a very difficult category to work in and not many writers effectively manage to find the right balance of historical fact within their artistic license with fiction. Fortunately, John Boyne gives an excellent example of historical fiction at its very best.

Many of the main characters, who are in their twenties, and the conflicts they endure represent the shift in British society from the old ways of the Edwardian and Victorian eras. That theme is very much a part of this book, the divergence from the old ways and the conflicts involved. And, of course, we know that Edward, Prince of Wales, was a chief instigator of change. Boyne's novel even suggests that this is essentially the reason for Edward's abdication, not his infamous mistress, Mrs. Simpson. 1936 was, after all, the year of three kings. In the book (as in reality), King Edward VIII seems to represent everything about a new generation and a beginning in a shift of collective consciousness. One of the book's characters who is on the abdication committee, Lord Keaton, says:

'Personally I couldn't care less if the king wanted to marry a donkey. It doesn't make a blind bit of difference to me. But the man has a way about him that has to be stopped. All this business with the miners in the North-East. The little visits he makes. This nonsense of 'something has to be done.' He thinks the monarchy is there to be shared with the people. He understands nothing about our ways. It's as simple as that. But Baldwin...now he understands. He can see the damage the man is doing.'

The following discussion in the novel also illuminates a number of interesting issues/concepts especially related to the abdication of Edward VIII. One of our members recently pointed out that the morganatic marriage option is essentially what Edward finally ended up with, only crownless. (Ironically, it is also essentially what his successor, Prince Charles, was allowed to do in taking his second wife, the divorced Camilla Parker Bowles, and who was not required to sacrifice his crown.)

'The king proposes that he and Mrs. Simpson marry but that their marriage be a morganatic one—...A morganatic marriage,' repeated Monckton. 'Whereby the issue of the marriage would not be in line for the throne.'

'Good God,' said Keaton. 'She's not pregnant, is she?'

'No she's not,' said Monckton quickly and angrily. 'And let us remember that we are discussing the king here and that some level of decorum needs to be maintained. As I was saying, the issue, should there be any,' he added loudly, 'would not be in line for the throne. After the king's death, the throne would pass to the Duke of York or, should he predecease him, to the Princess Elizabeth.'

'He can't be serious,' said Altringham.

'He's perfectly serious,' said Monckton, sitting back. 'And it seems a perfectly fair proposal if you ask me.'

'It would satisfy both sides of the debate,' said Roderick, nodding his head. 'And Mrs. Simpson. What title would she expect?'

'She would be willing to reject the title of queen, instead she could use the consort equivalent of one of the king's other titles. The Duchess of Cornwall is the preferred option.'

I was fascinated with the main characters of the book. They all exhibit some sort of serious flaws as humans but I was still sympathetic to them, even perhaps the most flawed of them all, the protagonist Owen Montignac. The characters often do rather horrible things to each other and yet you somehow understand what motivated them or how they found themselves doing the things they were doing.

The cameo appearance by King Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson, both central characters to the central plotline in NEXT OF KIN, occurs about two-thirds of the way through the book. It is an intimate meeting between Owen Montignac and the King and Mrs. Simpson at a gambling bar in London the night before the abdication:

The guests laughed and Montignac watches as Mrs. Simpson laid a hand gently on the king's arm, an affectionate gesture, entirely truthful and unpossessive, and the manner in which he used his other hand to tap hers affectionately while she did it. He observed them in their intimacy and envied them.

It is in this scene that I encountered the only instance (that I could find) of the author's artistic license at hand with the actual circumstances that occurred. As Society Members know, Mrs. Simpson was sequestered in France for many days leading up to the abdication. This scene has Mrs. Simpson in London the night prior to the abdication. But that is the fun of historical fiction...the writer has the ability to create scenes which could not have occurred. In this case, Boyne does so and provides us with a wonderful sympathetic portrayal of the King and Mrs. Simpson.

Boyne's book is just so very clever and I was constantly in awe of the author's ability to continue to weave recurring themes into so many different plotlines (e.g., birthright, definition of a family). My copy of NEXT OF KIN looks like some college textbook with dogeared edges and highlighted paragraphs on so many pages.

I strongly recommend this book. It is a very intelligent and exciting read, whether you are a Windsor-phile or not. But for those of you that are, I'll leave you with this final excerpt of why you'll be thrilled to read this book (for so many reasons) and you won't want to miss NEXT OF KIN:

In Buckingham Palace, King Edward VIII slept alone but lay awake now, his mind torn by the twin tortures of duty and love. He didn't know why he wasn't simply allowed to do as he pleased—no one had ever denied him anything before—and he thought of his late father's prophetic words that after he was gone, his heir would destroy himself within a twelve-month. But he knew what he wanted and he knew who he could not live without. And if that meant giving up the throne, his own birthright, then so be it. But he would wait no longer to be married. They had plagued him for so many years to take a wife and now that he had chosen one, they claimed that she was unacceptable. The whole thing was a ridiculous irony.

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### **Thebruce1314 says**

Though his books seem to be hard(ish) to find in Canada, I am slowly working my way through everything that Boyne has written, because he's amazing. The characters in this novel, as in most of Boyne's work, are finely crafted and realistic, though often dark and deeply flawed. This book took me a little longer to invest in the story, as the first half was more about building motivation and backstory for the main characters, but the last half moved quickly and the payoff, as always, was worth it.

Another finely crafted novel from a master storyteller.

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### **Debbie Shoulders says**

Owen Montignac life has been one of setbacks; orphaned at five he was raised by an uncle who offered life of privilege. But that life should have been Owen's all along since a change in two different wills put him out of the money to fend for himself. To remedy the situation and get himself out of a gambling debts, Owen

meets another person with a life of grudges and the two of them set out to right the wrongs in their lives. Set in 1936, Owen lives among the upper crust of England and with the King about ready to make a momentous decision, he finds the opportunity to manipulate things for a better future. Boyne offers a protagonist with decidedly pathological tendencies whose encounters with supposedly good guys force the reader to reflect on their own ethics and morals.

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### **Robert Palmer says**

The time and setting is London , 1936.the first few chapters were very slow moving as the key players were introduced but when the pace picked up it moved faster and faster with each chapter. Owen montignac has a huge gambling debt and is anxiously waiting for the tons of money and property he will inherit at the reading of his Uncles will. He owes 50,000 pounds to the casinos oner and if he doesn't pay it off by Christmas it will most likely be his last Christmas. As you might guess he has been cut out of the will,his cousin Stella has gotten it all. In the background is the very public affair of King Edward VIII and Mrs Wallis Simpson,divorced from her first husband and seeking a divorce from her second husband and maybe even worse she is an American. The Prime Minster has called together six of the most highly placed members of the courts jurisprudence. ( of course the public must not know of this) the six men and the Prime Minster are to vote as to weather the King must put Mrs Simpson aside and marry a more suitable woman or abdicate the Throne .the six men are divided as to what must be done. Owen Montignac gets involved in a plot to make sure that the vote go's the way a certain person wants it to go. Their is much skulduggery afoot which reminded me of the movie " Strangers on a train" directed by Alfred Hitchcock . I didn't much like the last few pages but the novel as a whole was great. This is the third book by Boyne that I have read and he is now on my list of favorite writers

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### **James Fitzgerald says**

Another good book from John Boyne I enjoyed the characters in this book set in 1935 it is part historical saga with king Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson. Owen Montignac is expecting to inherit his late uncle estate and is shocked to find out that everything is to pass to his cousin Stella. he is in a bind since he owes \$50,000 pounds to Mr Nicolas Delfy that if not paid will mean he will end up 6' under. thoroughly entertaining with plots and sub plots buy the book you won't be sorry

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### **Robin says**

I enjoyed this book set in 1936 Britain very much. The increasingly creepy main character, Owen Montignac, is hard to forget, and Boyne is excellent at sketching in some of the relevant issues of 1936, especially the story of the King and Mrs. Simpson. A good behind the scenes look at politics, law, and wealth (or lack thereof). Recommended to historical fiction fans who like a darker read.

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### **Betty says**

What a disappointment this book was. John Boyne is touted as the most "venturesome of young Irish novelists"- but I beg to differ. The plot was quite good- but it took until halfway through the book for things

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to actually start happening- although there were hints being dropped all over the place. The really disappointing thing was the characterisation. The characters were inconsistent and not really credible. Jane Bently is simultaneously a ditzzy blond and an aristocratic schemer. The Machiavellian character of Owen Montignac oscillates between being vicious and caring for no one but himself, to philosophising on the meaning of life and whether things would have been different if his father hadn't been disinherited many years before. I had similar feelings about the characters of Boy in Striped Pajamas, but I made excuses because it was aimed at a younger audience and told through the eyes of a child.

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### **Sibylle Blomme says**

Absolutely love John Boyne's books! Have enjoyed this one too : well written, captivating, good plot... Onto the next one!

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### **Talia Smart says**

DNF @ p.150ish

I adore Boyne's writing style and I find the plot intriguing, but there's something about the way the events fit together in this novel that's making me anxious! I'll probably pick it back up when I'm feeling calmer/more willing to stress out!

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### **LJ says**

NEXT OF KIN (Suspense-Owen Montignac-England-1936) – NR/Wall banger  
Boyne, John – Standalone  
Penguin, 2006, US Trade paper – ISBN: 0141018798

First Sentence: Many years earlier, when he was a lieutenant in the army stationed just outside Paris, Charles Richards had come across a young recruit, a boy of about eighteen year of age, sitting alone on his bunk in the mess with his head held in his hands, weeping silently.

Owen Montana is a charming young man with a big gambling debt owed to a demanding casino boss. He expects all this problems to be solved with the death of his wealthy uncle. He did not expect to be cut out of the will and the estate left to his cousin Stella. Owen is determined to get what he feels should be his, no matter who is in the way.

This should have been a really good book. It started out well; the characters were good, although two of them had no redeeming qualities whatsoever, the dialogue excellent, the setting against the backdrop of Edward VIII and Mrs. Simpson interesting.

However, I have one major requirement for the author of a crime novel. It's not possible for me to say what that is without spoiling the book but the author violated that requirement and the book went flying across the room. Boyne is a very good writer but, the biggest problem of an author doing such an ending is that I'll no longer trust that author or read anything else by them.

## **Jen says**

Set in 1930s England, when Owen Montignac is cut out of his family's inheritance he must find another way to pay off his large gambling debts. What extent will he go to to accomplish this? And how far will his actions reach?

I was never able to establish much connection with the characters in this book. I found almost all of them repulsive, selfish and superficial. Their characterizations were often confusing. Owen was a pure psychotic; he killed multiple times with seemingly no affect, yet he felt some remorse for setting up Gareth? Gareth was supposedly a highly intelligent young man but seemed to have absolutely no sense. And Stella, she wanted to marry a man she didn't love because she didn't want to experience love again (due to the pain), yet in the end she claims to have quickly gotten over Owen ten years earlier.

I also felt there were elements of the plot just left hanging. I can't see a sequel to this book, so I don't understand why those elements were even introduced if they were just going to be left up in the air. And the main point I was waiting for an explanation on, why Peter cut Owen out of the will, was never revealed. The parts of the plot that did have resolution were fairly predictable.

I really didn't find anything that made this book stand out.

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## **Jean Overbeck says**

This started out as a bit like a well-written Jeffrey Archer type story but about half way through it became so much more. This author has a unique perspective on major historical events and makes you wonder if it could really have happened like that. This time was the abdication of King Edward VIII which has always been an intriguing episode in British history and although it was only a small part of this story it was a pivotal moment. Very interesting indeed!

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