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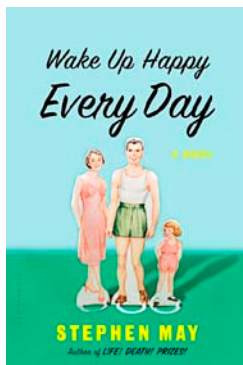
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YOUR BOOKSHELF

NOVEL
WAKE UP HAPPY EVERY DAY
by Stephen May
(\$17)



What Money Can't Buy

THIS HILARIOUS ROMP of a novel takes off quickly from its first scene. Nicky and his wife, Sarah, travel from England to San Francisco to visit their wealthy friend Russell for Russell's 50th birthday. Not long into their visit, Nicky finds their friend dead. A failure as a schoolteacher, now miserably employed as a local civil servant, Nicky is devoted to his wife and child, but unable to support them. Standing over his friend's dead body, Nicky hatches a big idea: Why not trade places with his rich pal and solve all of his financial woes? "It could be me...an old friend flown over by his generous buddy...who then — tragically — collapses and dies in a foreign land," Nicky tells his wife.

Nicky convinces Sarah and himself that his scheme is not only doable but also ethical: "It's not like we killed him," he says. With his loopy plan in motion, he gets his first look at his newly inherited fortune: "It really is a lunatic amount of money. Written down as a dizzying, paragraph-long string of zeroes, it doesn't even look like a number. It looks like a page from an avant-garde text-art project."

Predictably, Nicky and Sarah's changed circumstances trigger a cavalcade of problems. In the hands of a lesser writer, the plot of May's third novel (poor guy becomes rich guy overnight; complications ensue; poor guy discovers money can't buy happiness) might feel trite and overdone. But Stephen May, author of the equally ironic *Life! Death! Prizes!* and *Tag*, writes so wittily, so charmingly, that his characters and plot twists feel irresistible, shiny and new.

—Meredith Maran



KIDS' BOOKS

GIFT IDEAS FOR LITTLE ONES

Get your children turning pages over school break with these fabulous picks



Egg & Spoon
by Gregory Maguire
(\$18, young adult)

From the author of *Wicked* comes a new fantasy about a poor Russian girl from a tiny village. Kat makes a rich new friend, then sets off on an adventure that involves (natch!) a lovable witch.

PHILIP FRIEDMAN/Studio D (stack)