

The Good Luck of Right Now

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Introduction

For thirty-eight years, Bartholomew Neil has lived with his mother. When she gets sick and dies, he has no idea how to be on his own. He thinks he's found a clue when he discovers a "Free Tibet" letter from Richard Gere hidden in his mother's underwear drawer. In her final days, Mom called him Richard—there must be a cosmic connection.

Bartholomew awkwardly starts his new life, writing Gere a series of letters—Jung and the Dalai Lama, philosophy and faith, alien abduction and cat telepathy are all explored in his soul-baring epistles. But mostly the letters reveal one man's desire to assemble a family of his own.

A struggling priest, a "Girlbrarian," her feline-loving, foul-mouthed brother, and the spirit of Richard Gere all join the quest to help Bartholomew. In a rented Ford Focus, they travel to Canada to see the Cat Parliament and find his biological father . . . and discover so much more.

Introduction

1. Bartholomew Neil fears he is a failure. Is he? How does society determine success or failure in life? Do these measures work for those who are different, like Bartholomew?
2. At the beginning of the novel, Bartholomew has just lost his mother, and everyone is concerned for his emotional wellbeing. Are their fears misplaced? Do you think Bartholomew is handling his loss well?
3. Bartholomew tells us that his mother "could make small things seem miraculous." As you come to know about his life, do you agree? How can all of us make the small things in our own lives feel momentous?
4. Why does Bartholomew decide to write to Richard Gere? How does writing to the actor affect his understanding of his life and the people around him? Who would you "correspond" with if you needed help?
5. Do you believe in fate, or synchronicity, or acts of God? Do you think the universe has a rhythm or that God has a plan for each of our lives? Consider the series of events that leads Bartholomew from the beginning of the story to its end. How does the journey affect him?



6. Bartholomew admits that "pretending has always been easy for me. I have pretended my entire life." What has he been pretending about? Why was it easier for Bartholomew to pretend when his mother was ill? What does pretending offer us emotionally? Does it allow us to run away from our problems, or is it simply a coping mechanism?

7. Bartholomew's grief counselor, Wendy, tells him that he is "emotionally disturbed" from having lived in a "codependent relationship." Do you agree with her assessment? Did Bartholomew's mother raise him well or did she hold him back?

8. Describe Bartholomew's relationship with Father McNamee. What does the priest offer him that his mother cannot? Why does Father McNamee leave the church?

9. What does Bartholomew learn about life and love from his mother? Do you think she's an unrealistic Pollyanna, or does her attitude help her and her son overcome the inevitable hardships and occasional cruelty of life? What is "the good luck of right now?"

10. Bartholomew muses, "What is reality if it isn't how we feel about things?" How do you answer this? Can we create our own reality?

11. What draws Bartholomew to Max and his sister Elizabeth, the Girlbrarian? How are the three of them alike? How do they help one another?

12. When Bartholomew, Max, Elizabeth, and Father McNamee arrive at the Canadian border, the customs agents asks them a host of questions. Later, Bartholomew thinks about the inquisitive agent. "Are those types of questions able to define us as people—measure our worth, our goodness, and whether or not we are safe visitors? Where are you going? What do you do for a living? Business or pleasure?" Why do we often ask these kinds of questions and do they ultimately matter? Do you agree with Bartholomew's viewpoint? What, in your opinion, defines a person and his or her character?

13. Do you think people focus too much on the negative in the world and, as a result, overlook the good? How can we help ourselves and others to see beyond the bad—to see the all that good in our lives and around us?

14. What three adjectives would you use to describe *The Good Luck of Right Now*? What did you take away from reading the novel?