



# Falling Sideways

*Thomas E. Kennedy*

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## **Falling Sideways** Thomas E. Kennedy

There seems to be no shortage of business at the Tank, a high-profile firm in Copenhagen. There are meetings to attend, memos to write, colleagues to undermine. But when the Tank's nefarious CEO announces a round of downsizing, everyone becomes exponentially more concerned about ... whatever it is they're doing. Not since Joshua Ferris's *Then We Came to the End* has there been such a savvy satire of contemporary work culture, and the distorting effects it can have on our lives.

Following these imperiled company men and women out into the autumn days and nights of Copenhagen, Thomas E. Kennedy traces the ripple effects of the news at the Tank as it impacts spouses, children, and lovers. Top executive Frederick Breathwaite is frantically trying to ensure a stable future for his son, while the boy's greatest fear is that his future might resemble his father's absurd present. Harald Jaeger is estranged from his wife and daughters but pursuing desperate passions for other women (including the Tank's married CFO). And while he's lost in amorous fantasies, he has managed to catch the CEO's eye-as a possible replacement for Breathwaite.

Sharp, funny, but remarkably tender, *Falling Sideways* is the second book in Kennedy's virtuoso Copenhagen Quartet, and a book that will continue to build his reputation as one of America's most versatile literary novelists.

## **Falling Sideways Details**

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# From Reader Review Falling Sideways for online ebook

## David Grieve says

I nearly decided not to read this as I wasn't sure if I was intersted in reading about corporate life in a large, high profile company in Copenhagen. However, as soon as I started I realised what a good book it is. Beautifully written and observed with intriguing characters and situations. Several parts made me squirm having been through exactly the same thing myself. There were shades of American Psycho in the lists of brands and items often referred to through the story.

I found the story surrounding the older members more gripping then thier children and the nanny which for me was repetitive and didn't really take anything forward.

It was good to read a story where I really cared what happened to the individuals, for good or ill.

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## Kathleen says

This was an enjoyable read not only because of the Copenhagen setting for which Mr. Kennedy is known and the well written prose, but also because of the clearly developed characters and relevance of the stories.

If I could choose one quote to summarize the theme of this book, it would be one that appeared towards the end, when Jes - son of an aging senior manager at the Tank - is reflecting over the words of the poet Rilke,

"All the 'important things' that the grown ups try to do ... to really love is the hardest thing we have to do, and the most important thing. Young people ... {are} impatient and we throw ourselves at each other and we fail in our love. We have to learn how to love but first we have to learn how to let our solitude develop."

This is a story of fathers and sons, of husbands and wives, and of employers and employees. Relationships intersect, individuals disappoint each other, and there are a lot of regrets over dreams not realized. Yet in the end, things are resolved "While There Is Still Time."

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## Ian Mapp says

No idea why I picked this book up. I am usually meticulous in my research and thanks to Goodreads, have an ever growing list in my "to read" pile. Must have been a random selection, to which I am delighted.

This is not really story work of fiction - little happens, apart from some faceless (I was going to say nameless, but they are called "the tank") Danish quango company downsizing. A chapter in turn is given to a character who works there, an occasionally, their family members. A nice handy "who's who" is provided at the beginning of the book. I like that, almost as much as a map.

We get to understand their hopes, fears, motivations and you are never sure what the author is going to commit to paper. In the main, its excellent - almost like little philosophical snippets of thoughts on how we live our lives today. Its not surprise that Alain De Botton, the only living philosopher I know, provides the

quote on the front of the book.

Enjoyed it immensely.. at times it make you think, at times laugh, but the thing that will stick with me the most is the descriptions of the Braithwaite, the office manager, enjoying his whisky. There a couple of pure poetry pages where the author teaches you how to enjoy it, how to savour it and how his life is going to go downhill when he can only afford cheap blends. It literally had me walking to the drinks cabinet at home. Superb writing.

A major success - its one of four books about Denmark that can be read in any order and I will certainly be seeking out the rest.

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## **Darin says**

Thomas Kennedy, an American expat living in Denmark, finally sees his acclaimed Copenhagen Quartet begin to appear in print in the US; Falling Sideways being the second so far. Not having read In the Company of Angels yet, I am unable to consider more than this individual title.

Essentially a meditation of the definition of success, how to achieve it and how it differs between individuals and generations, the novel examines a week in the lives of a group of corporate executives at a Copenhagen firm experiencing some financial trouble. As the executives plot their next moves, or are gripped by events beyond their control, their families - husbands, wives, children, friends - are equally impacted by the growing maelstrom.

Successful businessmen in their own eyes are brought down to earth by cold-blooded executives, humbled by children seen as either churlish or bohemian, doubted by lovers and undermined by colleagues. A generation which defines success purely in materialistic terms is unable to even communicate about future paths towards success with their children who are not slaves to brand names, expensive liquors and worries over real estate prices. In this aspect, I detected a strong influence of Turgenev's Fathers and Sons, updated for a new generation. Particularly, the CEO refuses to believe that his son could have no interest in a career that would lead him in the same direction as his father. Naturally, the father will not allow his son to become romantically involved with the au pair who watches the youngest children in the house, as she is of a lower class.

Others define success as sexual conquest and there appears to be a John Updike influence here. A teenager is simultaneously obsessed with and frightened by sexual overtures; a seemingly cold, ruthless executive is serviced by a dominatrix; another executive engages in fetishistic behaviors that cost him more than he can afford to pay.

Essentially, lies are told to each other and to themselves, all in an attempt to maintain an illusory quality of existence. In the end, the structured world these people have built for themselves crumbles and their Dionysian essences are released, for good and bad.

Ultimately, Kennedy creates a believable world rooted in office politics and sexual confusion. If you have worked for any length of time in an office setting, you should find something enjoyable here. In addition, he has an ability to paint vivid landscape pictures, essentially surrounding the reader with the sights, sounds and scents of Copenhagen in autumn. I am looking forward to further volumes in the Quartet.

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## **Adriana Bulgarelli says**

Played in Copenhagen, the novel tells about the life of some employees in a firm.

Every chapter carries the character's name and tell us a lot about his life and how it's affected by work.

Among these high class, totally useless characters there is Jalalal-Din, bartender and realistic muslim counterpart of this drama.

Very well written, fast-paced and with a good analysis of the characters, this book mocks the Danish high-society, but in a different way than the best Danish writer Peter Hoeg.

It has more to do with brain problems and gossip papers and sadly describes real life of real people having no real problem but themselves.

I found the descriptions irresistible: the colours the scenes the way people behave.

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## **Abby says**

I found this book by random chance in the library. I was slightly confused while reading the jacket because instead of giving reviews on the book I was about to read, it had good reviews for a different novel by Kennedy. I found this book easy to read because most of the chapters were between 1-5 pages long. Instead of numbering chapters, they are titled with character names. Each chapter flips back and forth between characters. It was slightly difficult to distinguish the characters for the first half of the book, mainly because many are related, and I found myself referring to the character description page frequently. I feel the characters were introduced well enough to get the reader interested, however when Kennedy came to the point of exiting characters from the novel, it seemed he left many details unresolved. This was a somewhat depressing read and I found myself disappointed with the ending. Kennedy's writing style is kind, however it seems that he builds the reader up with anticipation, and then fails to follow through with a satisfying story line.

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## **Donovan Richards says**

### **A Nominee for the Bad Sex in Fiction Award**

While I do not consider myself a prude, I often find the descriptions of sex in novels to be awkward, misplaced, and unconvincing. Of course, I would rather find authors willing to mention these taboo subjects encountered in everyday life than having them merely avoiding it. But, it seems like authors tend to lean on shock value and graphic description instead of artful representation.

Humorously, *Literary Review* has hosted the Bad Sex in Fiction Award for the last twenty years. Highlighting the worst in sexual encounters, the award honors the misuse of sex in literary fiction.

Thomas Kennedy's new work, *Falling Sideways*, ought to be the frontrunner for the 2011 Bad Sex in Fiction Award. Inserted in most chapters and shamelessly described, sex is the central narrative feature of the book.

## **The Tank**

Set in Copenhagen, Denmark, *Falling Sideways* follows the lives of employees at the Tank, an ambiguously defined company that monetized some sort of intellectual property but is currently falling on hard times.

The actions of the company are, in fact, so pointless, that Jes, the son of one character, proclaims,

"It seemed to [Jes] that almost nobody in Denmark actually did anything anymore; they all just sat in offices sending e-mails to one another or went to meetings where they sat around a table and talked about the e-mails" (105).

### **Downsizing Brings Out the Worst in People**

With an unstable economy, the Tank's CEO, Martin Kampman (a calculated and unemotional individual), must reshuffle the organization, trim its fat, and promote efficiency.

These swirling rumors about downsizing make most employees work in fear; they release tension through various addictive tendencies such as smoking, drinking, and sex.

As an example of one addictive tendency, Kennedy writes,

"It seemed smoking was responsible for just about all the evils of the world now. It had gotten to be embarrassing even to buy cigarettes. Maybe they would pass a law that would require you to say to the shop clerk: I am an idiot. May I have a pack of Prince Silvers, please? And if you didn't: Sorry, madam, but you didn't say you were an idiot. The law requires..." (89).

### **>A Snooze in Copenhagen**

Sadly, despite an intriguing premise behind the book, Kennedy's prose and narrative structure are merely adequate. Of course, the previously mentioned insistence on bluntly depicting sex provides a hindrance to the storyline. But even more, Kennedy spends little time creating compelling characters.

Aside from the ease of reading the book, I found little enjoyment in reading it. Moreover, not many literary themes held my attention throughout the book.

In perhaps the only interesting twist, Kennedy has created a world of anxiety, depression, and regret in a setting well known as the happiest place on earth. Yet, such an observance only bolsters a book in conjunction with deeper characters and plotlines.

Despite being a frontrunner for the Bad Sex in Fiction Award, I find little reason to recommend *Falling Sideways*.

Originally published at <http://wherepenmeetspaper.blogspot.com>

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### **Jan says**

Keen and full of insight in the human condition using the backdrop of Copenhagen and Danishness fully and charmingly

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## Hira says

Author Thomas Kennedy in his first book, "Falling Sideways: A Novel" attempts a satire based in the workplace. The novel tells the story of Tank, which is the company that characters such as Fredrick Breathwaite, Martin Kampman and Harald Jaeger call their workplace.

We have Breathwaite, who is a high-ranking employee of the company, whose only dream and desire in life is to further the future of his son Jes, who happens to want no part of his father's dreams for him. On the other hand, we have Harald Jaeger, who is estranged from his wife and children, but despite his misgivings in his personal and love-life, he seems to be succeeding at Tank. And then, there's the cold, and hard-edged Martin Kampman, the CEO of the company who is down-sizing in order to keep Tank running efficiently.

Because it was written as a satire, Kennedy's characters are mostly dark. They are not very personable, and although some narrative comes from their friends and family, the reader rarely makes a connection at an emotional level. On a cerebral level, this book is definitely a cleverly penned novel. Ultimately, this book had a few key high-points, and a few low-points as well. I did enjoy reading it, however, so if you read the synopsis and find it to be to your liking, go for it. For me, it was a good book, highlighting interesting situations in the workplace, but not a memorable book that had characters with which I could connect.

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## Katie says

A book about corporate politics (but really, a character study featuring an ensemble cast) set in Denmark.

I found this to be an engaging read. The book is about corporate politics, and all the backstabbing and kissing up that can ensue, which I always find interesting to read about, being stuck in the corporate world myself. But mostly it's about the characters--the various employees in their various stations, their spouses and children, and their relationships with each other. There are culture clashes, spousal infidelity, imperfections galore of various kinds, rebellious children, growth and change.

I found the characters pretty richly developed, and was interested in reading even about those that were distasteful. One of my favorites was the CEO, who is an extreme Type A personality with obsessive control over his schedule, workouts, workday, etc., to the degree where he even wakes up his teenage son at 5am every day, just to avoid the boy being "lazy"... kind of a control freak, but kind of fascinating to read about.

The Danish setting was interesting, too, although you quickly realize that the same types of corporate melodrama happen there as here in the States.

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## Michael says

There is a shortage in business at the tank, a firm that is held in Copenhagen. There are meeting to attend, deadlines to meet and enemies to watch. Fredrick Breathwaite's is an executive at his company and the only thing that is his number one goal is setting a future for his son Jes; who does not want to walk in his father footsteps. His son has other plans that is against his father wishes, and he tries to change his mind, not

realizing that his son would do whatever it takes to be his own person. In addition Breathwaite's coworker Herald Jaegar is estranged from his wife and his two little girls, because of his infidelity. There is a opening for Jaegar, when he tries to replace one of his friends position. This is an okay book, it had some high and low points but for the most part it was a disappointment after reading the synopsis.

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### **Abby says**

Pretty depressing/realistic/depressingly realistic. But also, really well-written.

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### **Bill says**

I am addicted to his writing and am developing a nostalgia for a city i have never visited. will be looking forward to the last of the copenhagen quartet this spring.

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### **Doug Cornelius says**

Thomas E. Kennedy paints a satirical picture of the people affected by a downsizing at a Copenhagen company. Martin Kampman is the hard-edged CEO of the Tank, Frederick Breathwaite is the down-sized manager and Harald Jaeger was promoted but has deep troubles with his romantic life. Kennedy adds in some family members and few other characters. Each tells their part of the story.

I usually don't enjoy books with multiple protagonists. It works if they have distinctive voices or if they are giving different viewpoints on the underlying story. I found Kennedy to be mildly successful in using each character. They really don't begin taking form until the second half of the book.

The real star of the *Falling Sideways* is the city of Copenhagen. Kennedy has spent most of the last three decades living there. The story is thick with the experience of living in his adopted city.

The publisher was nice enough to send me an advance copy of the book to read and review. It came through GoodReads First Reads program.

Although I enjoyed the book, I found it lacking. It's supposed to be a satire, but I didn't find much satire. There is not much of a story. It's about how the characters interact. I was hooked into continue reading to find out what happens to them when a vocational obstacle falls in front of them. I was hoping for a payoff.

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### **Tressa says**

I received this book from Good Reads' first-reads giveaways program.

This book reminded me a lot of Tom Rachman's "The Imperfectionists" but unlike Rachman's novel, "Falling Sideways" had virtually no likeable characters. Whereas Rachman's characters were sad but quirky, I found Kennedy's characters to be irritating, sex-crazed, unfortunate people. The premise of the book is how



individuals revolve around their place of work-the Tank-but after events happen, the characters go from annoying to despicable. There were slight glimpses of some promising characters like the au pair, Jytte, but she wasn't central to the novel. The other stories of the women in the book were also slightly more enjoyable than the men.

I didn't know what to expect when I went to read this book, but I found it much too European for me. I did think that the vignettes were a great way of breaking up the story, but overall I wasn't crazy about the story or its characters. If you enjoyed "The Imperfectionists" you may like "Falling Sideways."

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