



The Final Days of Great American Shopping: Stories Past, Present, and Future

Gilbert Allen

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An affectionate satire of the culture of self-indulgence, *The Final Days of Great American Shopping* exposes the American obsessions with money, mass marketing, and material objects. In *Belladonna*, a gated subdivision in upstate South Carolina, readers meet a colorful cast of characters doing their best to buy happiness in a series of sixteen closely linked stories from the past, present, and future. Whether speed dating, test driving cars, upsizing to dream houses, flying helicopters, or lusting after designer shoes, these small-town spenders have good intentions that often go hilariously awry as they search for emotional and spiritual comfort.

Gilbert Allen is a master at character development and the individuals in this collection are no exception. Among them are the childless, emotionally distant couple Butler and Marjory Breedlove; the harried appliance salesman John Beegle and his precocious, pole-dancing daughter Alison; and the one-handed soccer wunderkind Amy Knobloch. Also featured are Ted Dickey the mastermind of the *Mental Defectives* self-help book series and the undefeated Speed Dating Champion of the World; Jimmy Scheetz, the pragmatic philanthropist behind *Ecumenical Bedding*; Ruthella Anderson, a retired first-grade teacher addicted to *Star Trek* and to extreme couponing; and the mysterious Gabriella, an aging Italian beauty who presides over *Doumi Shoes*.

Arranged chronologically, the stories span nearly a century. While most are set in the recent past or in the immediate future, the book's title story is set in 2084. It depicts a dystopian shopping mall worthy of George Orwell, John Cheever, or Flannery O'Connor, and raises the question, "Can America survive international terrorism, ecological apocalypse, and demographic disaster to morph triumphantly into the USAARP?"

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