



Hikikomori and the Rental Sister: A Novel

Jeff Backhaus

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Thomas Tessler has cloistered himself in his bedroom and shut out the world for the past three years. His wife, Silke, lives right in the next room, but Thomas no longer shares his life with her, leaving his hideout only occasionally, in the wee hours of the night, to pick up food at the grocery store around the corner from their Manhattan apartment. Unable to cope with a devastating loss, Thomas has become isolated and withdrawn. He is *hikikomori*.

Desperate for one last chance to salvage their life together, Silke hires Megumi, a young Japanese immigrant attuned to the hikikomori phenomenon, to lure Thomas back into the world. Fleeing from her own shattering experience, Megumi has buried her pain in a fast life spent in nightclubs with nameless men. Now she will try to help Thomas and Silke as a “rental sister,” as they are known in Japan. At first Thomas remains steadfast and sequestered, but as he grows to trust Megumi, a deepening and sensual relationship unfolds.

Hikikomori and the Rental Sister is a taut novel that packs a big philosophical punch. In this revelatory and provocative debut, Jeff Backhaus asks, What are the risks of intimacy? Can another woman ever lead a husband back to his wife? And what must we surrender for love? *Hikikomori and the Rental Sister* pierces the emotional walls of grief and delves into the power of human connection to break through to the world waiting outside.

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