Rebecca Martin is a single mother with an apartment to rent and a sense that she has used up her illusions. I had the romantic thing with my first husband, thank you very much, she tells a hapless suitor. I’m thirty-eight years old, and I’ve got a daughter learning to read and a job I don’t quite like. I don’t need the violin music. But when the new tenant in her in-law apartment turns out to be Michael Christopher, on the lam after twenty years in a monastery and smack dab in the middle of a dark night of the soul, Rebecca begins to suspect that she is not as thoroughly disillusioned as she had thought.

Her daughter, Mary Martha, is delighted with the new arrival, as is Rebecca’s mother, Phoebe, a rollicking widow making a new life for herself among the spiritual eccentrics of the coastal town of Bolinas. Even Rebecca’s best friend, Bonnie, once a confirmed cynic in matters of the heart, urges Rebecca on. But none of them, Rebecca feels, understands how complicated and dangerous love actually is.

As her unlikely friendship with the ex-monk grows toward something deeper, and Michael wrestles with his despair while adjusting to a second career flipping hamburgers at McDonald’s, Rebecca struggles with her own temptation to hope. But it is not until she is brought up short by the realities of life and death that she begins to glimpse the real mystery of love, and the unfathomable depths of faith.

Beautifully written and playfully engaging, this novel is about one man wrestling with his yearning for a life of contemplation and the need for a life of action in the world. But it’s Rebecca’s spirit, as well as her relationships with Mary Martha, Phoebe, her irresponsible surfer ex-husband Rory -- and, of course, the monk downstairs -- that makes
this story shine.

**Amazon.com Review**

Tim Farrington's *The Monk Downstairs* follows the beguiling romance between a jaded San Francisco graphic designer and a monk who flips burgers at McDonald's. Rebecca Martin is a 38-year-old single mom who has lost her faith in men; Mike is a disillusioned monk who's lost his faith in God. The two meet just after Mike leaves his monastery of 20 years and rents the downstairs apartment of Rebecca's house. The last thing Rebecca wants is another romantic entanglement, especially since she has the emotional well-being of her 6-year-old daughter, Mary Martha, to consider. (A charming character in her own right, Mary Martha also happens to be "an infallible detector of bullshit.") And the last thing Mike wants is to agitate his already troubled soul. But after a few backyard cigarettes together at twilight and a few melted barriers, a tentative love story is underway.

Although Farrington's plot revolves around a classic story of unlikely lovers, there's no sappiness or clichés in his highly polished narrative. Indeed, his vulnerable characters and realistic dialogue will feel especially poignant for grown-up lovers. When the big night arrives and the couple must decide whether Mike will sleep over, Rebecca speaks for all single mothers.

"This is not just about us anymore," she said. "If that freaks you out, then please, please bail now. Because if you are going to stay here tonight, you're going to have to have breakfast with my daughter. You're going to have to be a decent human being. You're going to have to be a man."

In Mike we see what it means to bring spiritual strength to a relationship. When Rebecca suddenly becomes sharp and anxious, he does not retreat, nor does he paw at her for reassurance. Instead he knows how to sit with her, as if in meditation, staying present while not getting caught up in her fear. And in Rebecca we see what it means to speak honestly to a lover. This all may sound too lofty and preachy to be a juicy read, but Farrington has the quirky characters and the masterful skills to make this a highly entertaining and inspiring tale of adult love.

--Gail Hudson

**Product Description**

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