

# If you love Garrison Keillor, you'll love "Love Me"

By HARRY LEVINS  
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Budding writers ask fretfully, "What should I write about?" And wizened editors always reply, "Write about what you know." So Garrison Keillor has written about what he knows — writing.

His new novel, "Love Me," is the first-person narrative of a struggling writer in St. Paul, Minn., who hits it big with a novel, moves to Manhattan, signs on with The New Yorker, bombs with his second novel, sinks into writer's block, keeps the wolf from the door by writing a newspaper advice column and finally goes back to St. Paul and his quirky, long-suffering wife.

You've just read the entire plot of "Love Me," but don't worry. The plot is beside the point. "Love Me" is less a



## Signing/reading

**Who:** Garrison Keillor  
**Where:** The Sheldon, 3648 Washington Boulevard  
**When:** 7 p.m. Sept. 10  
**For information:** 314-367-6731  
On sale Monday

novel than it is an outlet for Keillor to play with riffs and ruminations — on life, on the Upper Midwest, on religion, on politics, on New York, on sex ... especially on sex, and scatology, too. Keillor uses his novels to unburden himself of observations a touch too naughty for his Lake Wobegon monologues on radio's "A Prairie Home Companion."

If you're a fan of those monologues (and I am), you'll have to read "Love Me," if only to keep up with Keillor's wry take on the world. But don't open the book expecting a novel in the traditional sense. For one thing, Keillor's New Yorker is run by the Mafia and edited by a wildly extroverted William Shawn. For another, much of the book consists of extracts from a writer's advice column —



## "Love Me"

A novel by Garrison Keillor  
Published by Viking, 272 pages,  
\$24.95

funny, but meaningless in terms of advancing the story. Then again, a story that hinges on a bad case of writer's block is going to have narrative problems anyway.

Still, some of the stuff is vintage Keillor, who can find a dark side to any sunny day. Before leaving St. Paul, his writer sighs about Midwestern smugness and says, "We are good people and we are mean sons of bitches; we're fractious, susceptible to envy, suspicious, cruel. ... I hate boredom. It terrifies me. Good-bye, Minnesota."

But New York wears poorly on him: "A lot of New Yorkers sit in dim rooms discussing their existential problems and the plain fact is: You drink too much and don't get outside enough." So: Hello again, St. Paul.

From Minnesota thou art, and to Minnesota thou shalt return.

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