

## Clara at the Edge

**Maryl Jo Fox**

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*Clara's story unspools in a compelling and engaging way.*

*Clara at the Edge* is a weird and engaging story of a widow, some wasps, and a traumatic past, a story that explores the importance of human connection.

Seventy-three-year-old widow Clara Breckenridge takes up her home, which is scheduled for demolition, to tow it to Jackpot, Nevada. Along for the ride are her estranged adult son, Frank, and a magic swarm of wasps. Those wasps once defended Clara from her abusive father, and they have been her protectors ever since.

During her unique journey, Clara must face her deepest fears and unlock her internal secrets. She reluctantly attempts to reconnect with her family, find a path to happiness, and satisfy her magic protectors before they fade forever.

Clara is a fascinating, feisty character whose magical wasps seem to function as a subconscious outlet. Now at the end of her life, Clara has spent forty years alone; her wasps drive her to unshackle herself from this self-imposed isolation. When she is confronted by violent youths attacking her and her home, Clara puts her own safety aside in the hopes of preventing a dark future.

The writing is haunting and lyrical, and frequently ripples with humor and heart. Clara's is not the only lens through which events are seen; the perspectives of her son, the locals in Jackpot, and a potential love interest also play in. Subtly shifting points of view give the narrative a dreamlike feel, but they also help to anchor its otherworldly aspects. For example, while the purple wasps at first seem like hallucinations or signs of a fractured mind, it becomes evident that most of the people around Clara also notice their strange behaviors and colorations. It is clear that there is an outside force pushing Clara.

Enchantingly languid pacing serves as a counterpoint to the story's ever-present countdown: even if the truth about the wasps and Clara's fate isn't clear at first, there's less than a month to root it out. Clara truly is at the edge of something greater than herself. As she finds herself surrounded by new friends, estranged family, and the ghosts of those she lost, Clara's story unspools in a compelling and engaging way.

JOHN M. MURRAY (November/December 2017)

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