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Damn Love

Jasmine Beach-Ferrara
IG Publishing (Jun 11, 2013)
Softcover $15.95 (192pp)
978-1-935439-78-3

First-time author writes with aplomb, possesses a keen perception of how love undoes a human heart.

"I get it. Broken hearts mend and in six months I'll see that we were never right for each other anyway. But this middle distance blows." Thus begins Jasmine Beach-Ferrara's linked story collection, *Damn Love*, and this punch-to-the-heart tone carries throughout the book. In nine stories, Beach-Ferrara offers a panoramic picture of interconnected lives, each broken by love. From the lesbian pining after her closeted friend, to the divorced couple who still sleep together, to the woman battling terminal cancer and an estrangement between her husband and gay son, love spares no one from the fight.

This is Beach-Ferrara's first book, but she writes with aplomb and possesses a keen perception of how love undoes a human heart. In "Custody Bus," Cassie tells of her ex-husband and sometime-lover, Carlos, who is convinced that her messy childhood is the source of her struggles in relationships. Of him, she says, "He wanted to fix me, to undo the past like it was a matter of bending steel rods." Throughout the book, a dividing line erupts between those who view the difficult as simple and vice versa, but is anything concerning love ever easy?

In "Love the Soldier," Keisha prepares to head to Iraq and fight a war her parents oppose, but beneath this disobedience lurks a secret: she is gay, though for years she maintains a heterosexual marriage. Of Keisha, the narrator says, "She might shy from the political frays and social causes that were her parents' lifeblood, but it did not mean she lived without a code." This "code" is a far cry from the one her lesbian friend, Alex, lives by in San Francisco, where her sexuality is not hidden. But as a doctor who treats heroin addicts and has been recently left by her longtime lover, Alex, too, fights her wars.

Smart, painful, and impressive in its scope, *Damn Love* explores what happens when relationships implode and leave a person no choice but to move forward. When pregnant Brenda encounters her ex in "Layover," she comes to a realization: "This is how you do it then, Brenda thought … Her mother chose to run. Hal chose Sarah. She chose Carlos but he chose his ex. Now, she chose this. That she could finally see a way forward—a flash of images, like a newsreel, a dream—was answer enough." This book will speak to anyone who has chosen to keep loving in spite of the scars.

JESSICA HENKLE (May 31, 2013)

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