Clarion Review

Romance

Heart House
Carey Lucki
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978-0-9869201-0-3
Four Stars (out of Five)

Stinging from an ugly divorce and longing to leave her city life behind, Ann Ralston finds the perfect retreat in a tiny cottage on Lake Huron. Here in the quaintly named “Heart House,” Ann hopes for solitude, but soon finds she has a magnetically attractive neighbor, Jaime, whom she cannot resist and yet cannot quite reach. What twist of fate brought them together? What forces conspire to keep them apart? In *Heart House*, debut novelist Carey Lucki explores the mysteries behind a once-in-a-lifetime romance.

As Ann drives the long road to her isolated cottage, she leaves behind the everyday world of work and worry, taking readers with her. Soon, all is driftwood and lakeside strolls. The quiet doesn’t last long, however, once her breathtaking neighbor introduces himself.

Ann’s swooning reaction to Jaime’s presence would be the melodramatic stuff of soap operas if not for her own bewilderment at her behavior. Lucki portrays Ann as a self-sufficient woman who isn’t used to being overwhelmed by a man’s presence. Ann is completely embarrassed by her breathless reaction, and yet finds herself spying on Jaime from behind the potted plants on her deck. Her self-deprecating humor makes her instantly likable.

Lucki slowly reveals the family histories, tragedies, and triumphs that have made this pairing both inevitable and taboo. The suggestion that the relationship is somehow forbidden turns up the heat and escalates the sexual tension. The love story is sensual and sometimes graphic, but never crass, relying largely on Ann’s elaborate fantasies. Every time the pair gets physically close, something pulls them apart, and Lucki skillfully uses this frustration to create a sense of urgency in their every encounter.

Lucki is economical with her dialogue, which reveals personalities quickly and effectively, especially among Ann’s acquaintances. Before her friend Renee can even finish ordering a drink, we know she is bold, brash, and reliable, just from the banter. Jaime himself is

a man of few words, which only adds mystery to the mix.

Descriptions are less elegant at times and can slow down the momentum of the story. Ann's inner observations go on a bit too long, which is unfortunate because there are gems hidden in those thoughts. For instance, when Ann is stunned to see Jaime while she's visiting Grand Cayman, she describes it "like the blackness of the room when the film stops running." This beautifully captures the time-standing-still quality of their meeting and does not require the additional explanations that follow. Moments like these, and the occasional poor word choice, slacken an otherwise brisk narrative.

Untangling the mysteries behind this modern case of star-crossed lovers keeps the pages turning all the same, making *Heart House* a solid, summer beach read.

Sheila M. Trask