

Here, Home, Hope

Kaira Rouda

Greenleaf Book Group LLC (May 2011)

Softcover \$15.00 (310pp)

978-1-60832-091-2

Transition into another phase of life is a common theme in fiction that explores the inner motivations of a dissatisfied, sometimes disillusioned protagonist. *Here, Home, Hope* is the story of Kelly Mills Johnson, a thirty-nine-year-old suburban woman stuck in a classic rut and not living up to her potential. Like many mothers who focus on family, often at their own expense, Kelly realizes it's time to reinvent her image of self to achieve real happiness. Rather than stagnating in a routine existence, she concocts a makeover plan.

Written with a bouncy sense of humor, this lighthearted novel delights the reader while delving into serious issues such as eating disorders and addictions, typical problems of middle-class America. Rouda never belittles the severity of these social ills, but she presents the reality of a potentially nightmarish ordeal without resorting to melodrama. The book's strongest attribute is a direct, frequently amusing, depiction of stereotypical events.

In the following quote, the author's bizarre brand of description evokes a mixture of laughter and empathy in anyone who has experienced intense dislike for a neighbor: "Tears ran down my cheeks as I crossed the street and headed up my driveway. Bruce's car was gone, and that was a good thing, because there's no telling what I might have done to it. I pictured hurling a rock from my garden through the windshield, but I doubt I would've done a thing if it had still been there. I was as effective at revenge as I was at anger without tears."

Though Rouda's novel is compared to *Desperate Housewives* and *The Middle Place*, its focus does not remain on the superficial contrivances of marriage and living in suburbia. Establishing a home staging business, a blatantly materialistic endeavor, has been deemed the solution to whatever ills may afflict this heroine, but the ultimate resolution lies in finding a genuine feeling of accomplishment. The pursuit of money in an affluent neighborhood plays a part in this first-person account of ennui, yet it does not detract from the book's underlying message. *Live. Don't wait until tomorrow.*

Kaira Rouda is an award-winning entrepreneur and author, a motivator known for empowering women. *Here, Home, Hope* is her first novel. Inspirational and engaging, Rouda will touch readers who can relate to the frustration of being sidelined on the field of life, never allowed to play and always needed behind the bleachers, until finally experiencing the joy of participation.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (April 1, 2011)

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