Clarion Review

Romance

In a Dream
Ayla Wood
Woodward Photography, designer
CreateSpace
978-1-4903-0251-5
Four Stars (out of Five)

Suspense and romance bolster the appeal of this engaging tale of danger, forgiveness, and love.

Two gunshots change Emma Potter's world forever in Ayla Wood's debut novel, *In a Dream*. Emma's struggle to build a life beyond her tragic past is hindered by ongoing mysteries and nightmare visions that soon prove all too real.

Wood's novel starts with a traumatic event that changed Emma's life at the age of five. Orphaned and terrified, she is taken in by a beloved grandmother and does her best to build a life beyond the tragedy that seems to define her. When her grandmother passes away and her uncle Peter insists that the home she grew up in must be sold, Emma is forced into an uncomfortable living arrangement.

Even as a chance meeting brings handsome Aiden Rivers into her life, Emma discovers that her uncle has gotten into trouble with a local mobster and that she, and the people she has come to love, are in danger. Events soon escalate, and her family's past ultimately threatens Emma's happiness and her life.

In a Dream boasts a compelling prologue that is sure to engage readers and draw them into the tragedy that befalls young Emma. Wood crafts an effective romance that manages to maintain suspenseful narrative tension to the end. The action gathers speed once Emma meets Aiden and is most effective from the midpoint forward.

Dialogue is natural, for the most part, and the plot is intriguing; Wood creates enough suspense to keep readers wondering whether even Emma's friends and new boyfriend may not have her best interests in mind. The author shines brightest in this ability to keep readers

guessing, and it proves the strongest aspect of her novel.

Characterization is generally well done, although Emma's character, while sympathetic and likable, sometimes makes decisions that seem out of sync with particular situations. A sudden choice to trust one person rather than another late in the story seems to come out of left field. As for Aiden, he seems almost too good to be true at first, but Wood quickly adds satisfying layers to his character and backstory.

Relationships, on a whole, progress quickly from acquaintance to roommate to lover. This is true not only for Emma but for a friend of hers as well, and some may feel the quick transitions lack credibility. However, once established, the relationships are well realized and progress at an effective and believable pace.

The writing is occasionally uneven, and novice errors are evident in instances of quirky sentence structure and unnecessary detail: "Emma's key scratched to its position in the lock then ground the tumbler until the door was free." There are a few typographical and grammatical errors, but they are unlikely to distract most readers from an otherwise effective tale of romantic suspense.

Overall, *In a Dream* is a promising debut from a writer who knows how to build suspense and keep readers guessing. Any who read her novel are sure to be intrigued enough to seek out her next book.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom