Clarion Review

General

Liberty Loomis
Susan Denman
AuthorHouse
978-1-4772-6404-1
Four Stars (out of Five)

"At Loomis Hospital we respect the differences of the people who come here for treatment. And there are certainly lots of differences, believe you me. I've seen all kinds of folks over the years, especially in the summer when it seems like the entire city of New York empties out and heads for the Catskill Mountains." That's how the head nurse explains things to Mayzie Jenkins on the first day of her new job as a nurse's aide.

In Susan Denman's *Liberty Loomis*, the summer of 1970 is a time of emotional growth for twenty-year-old Mayzie, a local girl home from her second year in college. She must soon decide what she wants to do with the rest of her life, and the decision plays out amid the social turmoil of the times and secrets from the past.

To help flesh out the characters, Denman employs numerous flashbacks—to Mayzie's parents' early years of married life, their growing family, and Mayzie's first job at age fourteen as a waitress at a nearby resort. These flashbacks also create a strong sense of family, which grounds Mayzie as she attempts to make sense of the changing world around her.

Mayzie's stint at Liberty Loomis Hospital opens her eyes to the harshness of the world. She meets two long-term residents of the hospital—women not that much older than herself, one with polio and the other with multiple sclerosis. She also befriends the sometimes bombastic Bobby Cutler, a thirty-one-year-old man who became paralyzed from the waist down following a diving accident on his twenty-first birthday.

As Mayzie is feeding the polio patient during her first night on the job, she realizes that the woman could choke and that she should have paid more attention to her training. “But then,” Denman describes, “she forces this horrible scenario into a back corner of her mind, with all the other things that she doesn’t want to face again until some distant tomorrow.” Beneath her smiling exterior, Mayzie has unconsciously hidden away an ugly secret.

This is Denman’s debut novel. She’s a physician who grew up on a farm in the Catskills; her early experience working at a rural hospital in the area inspired this work. Her writing is wonderful and true-to-life, and her characters are memorable beyond the end of the book. Just a handful of errors in the text, from an occasional missing word to the use of a wrong tense, detract from an otherwise beautifully crafted story. Mayzie’s family could be anyone’s family; they live, they love, they share moments—not realizing their poignancy until much later. Readers will look forward to more books by this author.

Robin Farrell Edmunds