

Losing My Breath

J. Rose Black

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A fairy-tale ending may be possible for a traumatized man and his alluring neighbor in the hopeful romance novel Losing My Breath.

A veteran and his sheltered neighbor forge a connection that might be meant to last in *Losing My Breath*, a contemporary romance novel by J. Rose Black.

Callan is a shut-in, a veteran who works in cybersecurity and turns down human interaction at every opportunity. When Meridian, clueless but beautiful, moves in across the hall, they begin a cat-and-mouse game of flirtation that leads to interest in more than being friends. Callan soon discovers that Meridian is not as helpless as she first appears. And as they progress from workout buddies to partners, Callan realizes that being in a relationship demands more of him than he feels ready to give. Both characters have walls up, each because of their very different pasts, but both must commit if their relationship is going to last.

The dialogue is snappy and snarky, with Callan and Meridian establishing clever banter early on. They speak in metaphors, with her being established as a fairy-tale princess and him being a dropout from Prince Charming school. This framing continues throughout the book. Both are rather solitary figures, with Callan's only friend being one of his wartime buddies, and Meridian's small circle of friends not intruding on her life very often.

The novel showcases only Callan's point of view, peppered with glimpses into his PTSD. His memories of wartime violence impact his current experiences and actions in a clear way. They also lead to him being paranoid and possessive, with frequent bouts of dissociation and numbing. Meridian endures it all but also insists on therapy once it's clear that they are in it for the long haul. Callan agrees to therapy for her sake, which is at once a positive and disappointing development; the burden of instigating change still falls on Meridian's shoulders. Further, because the narrative is anchored in Callan's viewpoint, Meridian remains somewhat of a mystery: prissy yet persistent, beautiful yet self-conscious.

Food and shared meals play a prominent role in the story, with Meridian cooking for Callan as a gesture of gratitude once he rescues her from a criminal who followed her inside their apartment complex. Joint meals soon become a tradition for the couple, and these everyday, intimate scenes are part of what draws Callan out of his shell and self-imposed hermit lifestyle. Questions of retribution and karma haunt him, though, leading him to wonder if he truly deserves happiness.

Losing My Breath is a heartfelt romance novel in which opposites attract—and do the work to make their love last.

JEANA JORGENSEN (March 27, 2024)

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