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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ ROMANCE

Lost and Found

Charles Samuel Betts
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Amnesia induced by physical or psychological trauma to the brain is a terrifying condition. In *Lost and Found*, a successful businesswoman is injured in a car accident and no longer recognizes her family or friends. The events of Mary McGregor's life have been purged from her mind as well. In this poignant story, an interrupted romance takes on new significance. Jonathan McCandlish, a boyfriend, understandably questions the importance of a goal-oriented outlook when information in the brain has vanished like data on a computer hard drive.

In one moment all can be lost, as this passage from an Albuquerque hospital demonstrates: "It was Christmas Eve, and she slowly opened her eyes. She looked around bewildered. Where was she, she asked herself. It was a room that was all white, and she was lying in a bed. She reached up with her hands to her head and found it was covered in bandages. Her right leg was suspended, and her left arm was in a cast. As she became more and more conscious, she became aware of severe pain."

Though a protagonist with amnesia is a trite figure in women's fiction and soap operas, this heroine still captivates the reader. A certain appeal lies in watching a young couple work through the frustration of encountering the mental delete key. Perhaps more enlightening than the patient's plight, is the experience of the primary caregiver—in this case, a would-be lover. Jonathan must be the epitome of a hero to this vulnerable woman as she reestablishes a normal life. His trials and perceptions take precedence over Mary's rehabilitation, making him the real hub of this novel.

With an apt title and an intriguing premise, this storyline promised a great deal of potential. Unfortunately, the preponderance of extra characters detracting from the main plot and the poorly formatted presentation dealt serious blows to the project. In places the novel reads like a psychiatric case study, not a story, and the narrative overwhelms the interwoven dialogue with no clear division for conversation. The book is composed of large chunks of text that include speaking parts within run-on paragraphs. The talkative, overly casual style fails to bring out the worthwhile elements in this touching romance.

A resident of Little Rock, Arkansas, Charles Samuel Betts is a retired psychiatrist and world traveler. He is the author of genealogical studies. *Lost and Found* is his second novel.

Despite its flaws, this heartfelt story is a delicate exploration of the mystery of love and the unknown functions of the psyche. Written from the standpoint of an experienced psychiatrist, the author's knowledge enhances this work, allowing a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the difficult retrieval and recovery process within the brain. For those who seek an alternative to a stereotypical commercial presentation, this author's unusual approach may intrigue an audience seeking information about amnesia for personal or academic reasons.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (July 29, 2011)

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