



Clarion Review

General

Magic Words in the Palace of Desire

Lou Zitnik

Lulu

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Read this book with a purring cat on your lap; if you don't own a cat adopt one immediately! As Papa Joe says in this lush novel's beginning "people who don't talk to animals cannot be trusted." Of course Papa Joe also shares tequila with his cats...

The Hilo Humane Society is overflowing with unwanted cats despite the best efforts of Papa Joe Steamer Doc Theresa and various other characters' attempts to save the world.

This whimsical novel narrated by cats requires a willing suspension of disbelief and contains a few point-of-view inconsistencies (for example Patsy the cat reacts to a statue of Jesus on the cross as if it were real man unlike the people in the movies who have no smell) but the emotional and experiential payoffs are wonderful.

In the Palace a movie theater built in 1925 which serves as Patsy and her owner's home Hilo residents congregate to hear the magic words of love and to come to grips with their desires—for the most part people times and items missing from their lives.

While Patsy searches for her human friend Mimi who has gone away her owner Steamer struggles to complete a list of good deeds and Papa Joe adopts two strangers. The sights and sounds but especially the smells of Hawaii loom large interwoven in the characters' everyday doings. While the cats smell ginger in the air and stinky tuna treats in a drawer Dr. Fred's Special Blend is the only brand of coffee with enough caffeine to keep troubled Manny awake on the graveyard shift. Of course barking dogs and coqui frogs are constant.

There just aren't enough good things to say about this book which joyously awakens all five senses in the reader and even a sixth—that of imagination and possibility of goodness and love unseen:

When deciding whether to buy used books Papa Joe never

bothered to read much only the first and last pages. He liked quick starts and happy endings in books that smelled good. This letter smelled like coffee air conditioning and Ivory soap. Not a bad reading smell.

Author Zitnik is a strong confident storyteller and his words melt into the reader's dream like real butter on movie popcorn. This novel is magically desirable and deserves a better cover design and more professional package.

Zitnik holds a doctorate in American Studies. He is the author of *Blues in Paradise: Weekend Stories* and teaches at Hawaii Community College. He was born in Panama taught English with the Peace Corps in Kabul Afghanistan and arrived in Hawaii by working as a scuba instructor; he also served as a sports writer for the Maui News for six years. A graduate of the University of Iowa Writer's Workshop Zitnik is also a two-time winner of the *Honolulu Magazine* fiction contest.

Holly Chase Williams