Clarion Review

General

Open With Love: A Novel of Discovery
Roberta Raye
CreateSpace
978-1-4537-3366-0
Four Stars (out of Five)

A troubled woman seeks serenity and consults her inner goddess to resolve tribulations that plague her daily. In *Open with Love*, Roberta Raye delivers this popular theme with a creative twist by presenting it in a fictional context rather than the usual step-by-step guide to living. The story is confessed, much like a sequence of diary entries, from the viewpoint of Grace Nash, divorced heroine and overworked mother.

Though it might seem belittling to compare this story, a spiritual journey, with that of *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the similarities are apparent. Grace has a self-deprecating sense of humor and a self-battling demeanor that intrigues her audience from the first page. An eccentric acquaintance sends her letters, each of which triggers an awakening. Grace finds these handwritten messages more disruptive than helpful. In the early stages of reinventing herself, she resents this intrusion on her desultory existence. Every painstaking change is awkward, uncomfortable, and frightening.

The book's primary—perhaps only—flaw is its reliance on narrative with only occasional snippets of dialogue. This bogs the reader down in unrelenting pages of introspection. The letters Grace receives sometimes verge on condescending, and her reactions tend to be repetitive and predictable. Nevertheless, her experiences are fulfilling and worthwhile to read about, and they can offer comfort to someone else suffering through a transition.

As the following excerpt shows, the mesmerizing letter written by Bea does give sage advice: "Once you have come to know your particular fear habits, when you allow yourself to notice and recognize the fear under anger, under apathy, under resistance, then you will be able to be a wise steward of this powerful force."

As Grace confronts her "demons" and receives extensive revelations, both her internal and external worlds change. Not only does she become more confident and affable in social

situations, she finds greater enjoyment in her children and no longer engages in defeatist behavior. Feminine clothing, along with a domestic sanctuary, provide her with the palette for expression that she craves.

The outward manifestation of Grace's transformation seems superficial, maybe even a bit trite, but those material signs are merely a cloak for deeper discovery: "My clothes weren't the only thing that didn't seem to fit. I got more and more uncomfortable everywhere in my life. Work was the worst. Sitting on my butt under fluorescent lights looking at a computer screen made me want to tear my hair out."

A polished, visually pleasing front and back cover give this novel a marketing edge. Though personal and raw, the stylistic presentation on every page deserves high marks for ingenuity and sincerity. Grace escapes from an artificial role dictated by society and emerges an honest woman—recreated by herself and no one else.

Julia Ann Charpentier