



Scarlet Yearnings Beyond First Glance: Collector's Edition

Scarlet Ibis James

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Couples seek commonalities to bridge their cultural differences and people seek self-understanding in the musing short story collection Scarlet Yearnings Beyond First Glance.

In Scarlet Ibis James's diverse short story collection *Scarlet Yearnings Beyond First Glance*, friends, lovers, and family members reckon with love across various divides.

From Alzheimer's disease to stress, death to break-ups, and stalking to long-distance longing, the stories focus more on hurdles to love than keys to its success. In "The Affair She Didn't See Coming," a woman takes a class on sensuality and regains comfort in her body. In "Code Black, Code White," family members accept the budding romance between a Black and a white doctor before the couple themselves do. In "Under Long Term Observation," a recent divorcée outwits her ex-husband by recording his intrusions. And in "Love of My Daughter's Daughter," a departed grandmother tells her living granddaughter what she was never able to say in life.

Like the white adopted son of a Black father and Asian mother in "Code Black, Code White," the stories draw from a potpourri of pairings. "Chicago's riot of mid-rise glass and old stone" characterizes the layered and random comings-together upon which the stories are built. Their plots revolve around finding commonalities and bridging cultural and other differences. Meals prepared by a nascent couple, a Ghanaian chef and an Indian organizer, in "He Did Not Come Back" mirror a unique blending of their aspirations and desires. The coincidences common to city life are used to define lasting connections throughout, balancing chaos and order.

The plots, however, are sometimes sidelined by attendance to their takeaways. The descriptions of two disparate lovers a woman meets and the cities in which she meets them on business travel in "Stay" are reduced to lists of traits that she compares and contrasts between. Just as she chooses herself over either of them, the book at times chooses self-help declarations over deep characterizations and thorough atmospheres. For instance, in the futuristic setting of "Love in Cosmic Times," the fight to preserve autonomy is underdeveloped, as are the story's heroes. Further, patterns of three single-word sentences in a row become less impactful as they are repeated across different stories.

More evocative are the lovers' conversations. A visit home in "What Grandmother's Hold," and jury duty in "Released for the Day," are ruses and stages that enable honesty and acceptance between their characters. Personal introspection is also handled with care: In two stories, women find solace through learning after much resistance and procrastination, developing satisfying self-care methods in the process.

Wisdom flows throughout the short story collection *Scarlet Yearnings Beyond First Glance*, about how self-discovery is the cornerstone of sustainable relationships.

MARI CARLSON (April 14, 2026)

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