



Stone Heart

Susan K. Hamilton

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In the novel Stone Heart, former lovers reunite but face painful fallout.

In Susan K. Hamilton's novel *Stone Heart*, a rock star regrets leaving her first love behind.

Lauren, the lead singer of the Kingmakers, returns to New York City, where her band is scheduled to work with a producer. When it comes to new lyrics, though, Lauren is stuck. During the band's studio sessions, her sense of loneliness grows. Being in the city reminds her of her high school boyfriend, Danny, whom she left behind to pursue her career in music.

Danny, who is now a detective with the NYPD, hasn't forgotten Lauren either, making his wife, Heather, jealous and causing arguments in their marriage. When Lauren and Danny do reconnect, their entanglement leads to additional anguish in Danny's family. Lauren shifts between accepting their situation and feeling a sense of misgiving. Danny tries to disengage from his family, whose traditions he still appreciates; he is fueled by nostalgia for what he and Lauren once shared. Lauren and Danny find solace in each other, but Danny's infidelity is an ever-present complication.

The novel's marital issues are handled with lucid sensitivity. Danny and Lauren slip into reckless behavior in a realistic, gradual manner: they exchange memories, make personal disclosures, engage in growing intimacy and secrecy, and come to exhibit disregard toward others. Their passions take over, even as they face criticism from their family members. Still, Danny feels out of place in Lauren's glamorous world, and Lauren fears that Danny's commitments to his family will win out over their reignited passion.

Though the novel achieves nuance in its depictions of how infidelity impacts other people, Heather's presence in the story is minimal. She is most often present for discontented exchanges, or addressed via Danny's occasional twists of conscience. Cast as the rejected wife, she is not developed beyond this role. And the secondary cast is present to express their restrained support or to air their opinions of Lauren's and Danny's decisions. They generate much of the book's momentum, though their own vitality varies. Among them, Lauren's cousin and bandmate, and Danny's father, are the strongest sources of both caution and wisdom.

Lauren's rock-and-roll life is evocative throughout. The story embodies the trickiness of navigating a televised interview as well as the tension of her recording sessions. Her commitment to music is clear, and the return of her artistic talents inspires the novel's ultimate reckonings.

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KAREN RIGBY (September 1, 2022)

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