ForeWord Reviews

SPIRITUAL

Strays: A woman, a dog and the timeless wisdom of nature
Jeanne Webster
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In the tradition of Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist*, James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophesy*, and Carlos Castenada's *The Teachings of Don Juan* comes *Strays*, by Jeanne Webster. This tale of a woman searching and finding her *raison d'être* from a soulful point of view is steeped in magical realism.

Webster informs the reader that, "the stories in this book are stories I heard either as a child or in my adult years. They have been handed down from generation to generation. Only one or two stories were written by me in keeping with the theme of the book." The author weaves them together seamlessly, making it impossible for the reader to determine which parts she created.

Jane Morgan, a twenty-four-year-old staff writer at an Atlanta newspaper, is the story's focus. She has just been laid off and is tired of her stagnant relationship with Dan. She flees the city for a month-long retreat in the Smoky Mountains, a cabin her refuge as she examines her life and determines the next steps. Lucky for Jane she does not have to make this journey alone.

At a scenic overlook in North Carolina, Jane tumbles and hits her head, awakening the ability to converse with animals, plants, and nature. Her first guide is a brown spider, with the voice of an elderly woman who extols the oneness of the universe, reminiscent of Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*.

The spider says to Jane, "You asked for it, you prayed for it, and now you will be graced with the answers." Each creature she encounters imparts wisdom and introduces her to the next guide. Once Jane relaxes, her magical voyage continues led by her new companion, a stray dog she names Max.

The reader must suspend all judgment to accompany Jane along her moral quest. Lessons are imparted along the way through the voices of trees, mountains, snakes, and bears. Webster's crisp, clean vocabulary lures the reader in and keeps them turning the pages to accompany Jane to the end of her journey.

Strays is Jeanne Webster's first work of fiction. Her first book, the award-winning *If you Could Be Anything What Would you Be,*

was published in 2004.

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