



The Crocodile Bride

Ashleigh Bell Pedersen

Hub City Press (May 10, 2022)

Hardcover \$26.00 (296pp)

978-1-938235-91-7

In Ashleigh Bell Pedersen's captivating coming-of-age novel *The Crocodile Bride*, eleven-year-old Sunshine lives with her father, Billy, in the bayou town of Fingertip, in a yellow house that tilts, "exhausted, to one side." Her Aunt Lou and cousin JL, who is also her closest friend, live in the pink house across "the Only Road." Though lonely, Sunshine's childhood is animated by her grandmother's stories about elves, giants, and the crocodile bride who buried a monster's heart beneath the bayou and has magical powers to heal. But Sunshine's world is also haunted by ghosts: her troubled father drinks and darkens the house with his "indoor storms."

On the cusp of adolescence, Sunshine's life changes in the summer of 1982. Her cousin leaves for summer camp; her father loses his job, and his inner storms grow more threatening; and Sunshine learns important lessons about independence, resilience, and, with her aunt's help, life outside of Fingertip. Throughout, Sunshine prevails with determined strength and a spritely imagination.

The Atchafalaya Basin is a place of "strange, shadowy" mysteries, with quirky, dying towns. Its generations are covered via scenes from Sunshine's grandmother's move there in the 1940s; from Billy and Aunt Lou's youth there in the 1950s; and of Billy's drunken dancing to Bob Dylan and Muddy Waters. And poignant prose captures Sunshine's "chain of grief, passed from generation to generation. From a father who destroyed all he touched, perhaps even from his father or mother before him ... in a past impossible to visit. A grief with no words to give it shape, to give it light."

Told with vision and compassion, *The Crocodile Bride* is a novel about a strong-minded, resourceful girl who breaks from her dark family history and hopes to live out a better story herself.

KRISTEN RABE (March / April 2022)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.