

The House of Erzulie

Kirsten Imani Kasai

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Kirsten Imani Kasai weaves a spellbinding tale in *The House of Erzulie*, intertwining elements of horror and erotica expertly. Purposeful discomfort abounds in this eerie novel that brims with masterful, uncanny language.

Part of the novel takes place in the 1850s, told through enticing diary entries and letters. These explore the relationship between Emilie, the daughter of Creole slaveowners, and Isidore, a biracial French man who has arranged to marry her.

What starts as a relatively uneventful romance soon takes a dramatic turn. Emilie laments the deterioration of her husband's sanity as Isidore falls deep in lust for a vodou practitioner, and deeper into his crumbling mind. In the current day, Lydia unravels the story of Isidore and Emilie through their artifacts as her own mind starts to decay.

The novel's strongest asset is its magical, breathtaking writing. Every page is rife with powerful metaphors and lyrical prose that grab the reader by the throat and don't let go. Take Lydia's musing on the commercialization of Emilie and Isidore's plantation house:

Honeymooners will pay five hundred dollars a night to make love in remodeled sugar shacks and breathe in the dewy scent of magnolia blossoms while the bones of the dead molder six feet below the ground upon which they recline, heart to heart.

Or her pining for someone "to crave me as shipwrecked sailors pine for home and rescue, and men lost at sea crave rainwater ... Narcotic enchantress, demon lover, succubus. I will be the addiction and the remedy."

Kirsten Imani Kasai makes the macabre beautiful. She crafts a story that explores superficial scares while also delving into more complex topics like generational trauma and the horrors of slavery. *The House of Erzulie* makes you wonder what truly haunts our history, and how, if ever, we can escape it.

MYA ALEXICE (March/April 2018)

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