ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

The Mosaic Artist
Jane Ward
CreateSpace
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Children suffer when separation and divorce upset the equilibrium of their home life. Some couples manage this transition by maintaining civility and cooperating for the sake of their children. When a spouse has fallen for someone else, however, the one left behind may be too hurt to refrain from anger-fueled retaliation, making the breakup even more devastating for the children.

In her second novel, author Jane Ward explores the chaotic effects of divorce on the Manoli family. *The Mosaic Artist* takes place in the last quarter of the twentieth century; scenes alternate between the greater Boston area and a coastal cottage that serves as a getaway for Jack Manoli and his second wife, Sylvie. Although the story unfolds over the four days following Jack's death, the author uses many instances of flash-backs to explore a longer time period. Each chapter is narrated through the eyes of a different character, including Jack; his children, Shelley and Mark; and Slyvie Rocher, the woman for whom Jack sacrifices his first marriage. Readers learn, partially though flashbacks, how the characters experience and handle the aftershocks of divorce.

After twenty-three years of happiness with Sylvie, Jack suffers from terminal cancer. Bedridden in the guest room of the couple's condominium, he ruminates about past decisions. "The death room is the truth room and here's the truth: although I feel a great deal of sorrow over hurting my first wife and my children, I would do it again," he says.

Sylvie stays with Shelley and her husband for a week after Jack's death, and the two women talk the night of his funeral. Wanting family harmony long ago, Shelley forgave Jack and now recognizes the solidity of his union with Sylvie. She says, "Understanding this and knowing that I accept it stirs up disquiet within me, reminds me uncomfortably of Mark." Shelley has always been her younger brother's protector, a role assigned by her mother when she brought her second child home from the hospital.

Mark refuses to forgive Jack, and his anger prevents him from achieving success as a

mosaic artist or in personal relationships. His current girlfriend provides stability and direction, but he blows up at her after the funeral. Drinking beer in a bar after the ceremony, he considers seducing the bartender. "…I felt myself following Jack's stroll into adultery," he says. "Part of me was dangerously close to understanding why he walked and that, more than hate, scared me."

Ward deftly portrays the psychological dynamics of this broken family. She succeeds in the challenge of changing points of view, except for minor deviations to omniscient. Mark's rage and a passion for mosaic art that justifies breaking things to release that anger, make sense, but some readers may tire of the author's descriptions of this process. The same is true of incidental information related more than once from different points of view.

This contemplative novel shows that the damage of divorce can endure for decades, but sometimes it can be resolved satisfactorily. Readers will find the book engrossing, as well as enlightening.

Margaret Cullison