

The Surgeon's Wife

William H. Coles

CreateSpace (Aug 15, 2016)

Softcover \$10.95 (165pp)

978-0-9976729-4-7

This dramatic New Orleans story plays on themes of loss and love.

William H. Coles's unpredictable novel *The Surgeon's Wife* focuses on the romantic relationships and family dynamics of two surgeons.

Mike Boudreaux is a surgeon living in New Orleans. His medical mentor, Clayton, is delving into the world of weight loss surgery. With its loose guidelines and unpredictable surgical outcomes, Clayton's practice becomes a point of contention for Mike, who, as head of the Operating Room Committee, is forced to place restrictions on him.

When Clayton's neglected wife finds comfort in Mike's arms, Clayton feels even more betrayed. Thus begins his mental deterioration, which leads to erratic behavior and violence. Mike attempts to balance his strained friendship with Clayton, his budding relationship with the surgeon's wife, and his responsibilities at the hospital, but his life becomes increasingly chaotic.

As the novel opens, Mike and Clayton's friendship is already teetering. Aspects of their personal histories and professional responsibilities plague their relationship. While much of the novel revolves around Mike, less is revealed about his personal history than is revealed of other characters; he is emotionally difficult to relate to. Clayton's and Catherine's backgrounds are explored more in depth, and their fall from prestige—Clayton from his practice, Catherine from a life of luxury—is a more accessible story line.

The dialogue is most natural among the medical professionals, who speak in definitive ways; romantic scenes are more stilted. The writing is accessible; technical language, even in discussions of medical procedures, is kept to a minimum. Occasional artwork shows up before some chapters but is inconsistently utilized and does not add insight to the narrative.

The book takes place mainly in New Orleans, and descriptions of the city are proficiently woven in, from turn-of-the-century luxury in wealthy areas to small, close-knit areas of the French Quarter. While the vibe of New Orleans is referenced throughout the book, it is not fully captured.

The story jumps between characters, some of whom are abandoned for long periods of time and others of whom are introduced late in the text; they distract from the main story line. While themes of loss and pain connect all of the characters together, the plot frequently meanders. Through exchanges between Mike and the OR Committee that oversees Clayton's practice, interesting information about weight loss surgery is analyzed, adding a modern, controversial edge. Conflict capably drives the story into unpredictable territory. By the end, all story lines are convincingly resolved.

The Surgeon's Wife is a surprising drama of loss and love.

DELIA STANLEY (August 16, 2018)

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