Clarion Review

Romance

Wake-Up Calls
Connie Gaertner
iUniverse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

Wake-Up Calls by Connie Gaertner is a sweet coming-of-age novel that highlights the excitement and troubles of puppy love.

Life isn't all roses for seventeen-year-old Krista, who has just landed her first summer job. "I'm learning that working in a flower shop isn't a social event," she says, "but quite often the atmosphere can become tense." Adding to her tension is the realization that she can't ignore the inescapable tuggings of her heart when it comes to bad boy Jeff Wellington, whose sun-bleached hair and zest for life override Krista's logical side. Jeff is all she thinks about—until she meets Mario Watson, the florist's son. Caught in an unwitting love triangle, Krista spends the rest of her summer figuring out who she is and whom she wants to be with.

Gaertner captures the confusion of first love with perfect clarity. Each chapter unfolds a new dimension of second guesses and leaps of faith as Krista first allows herself to flirt with Jeff but then realizes that he may not be the best choice for her. "I have to be careful about showing interest in Mario," Krista says. "Besides, I think I like Jeff."

Gaertner also does an excellent job of depicting teen romance as a whirlpool of change and confusion by painting Jeff as a risk taker who's not quite ready to be a reliable boyfriend. He has his good side: He rescues a stranger floating in Lake Huron, and he carries heavy packages for elderly ladies without being asked. But he can be controlling. He unchivalrously borrows money from Krista and doesn't even thank her for it; his temper is quick and moody; and he's the kind of person who will get someone hurt someday. Jeff's personality is exactly what attracts Krista, who is intelligent enough to be cautious around him. In fact, she admits, "I'm afraid of Jeff; why am I out sailing with him?"

Krista is not the only one with misgivings. Mario, whose "penetrating dark eyes" shift Krista's loyalties, warns her that "Jeff's out for a good time. He'll always save himself, but can

he save you?" At first, Krista thinks Mario is treating her like a kid sister. But then she realizes that he has romantic feelings for her. "Our eyes talk to each other, but I doubt if either of us understands what they're saying."

Gaertner doesn't paint Krista as a perfect teen. She makes plenty of mistakes, but with the help of Cheyenne, a colorful character who arranges flowers at the shop, she takes the time to learn from her missteps. This makes her a highly believable and sympathetic character. Since *Wake-Up Calls* is told in the first person and in the present tense, the reader gets to live each minute with Krista and cheer for her to make the right decision—to find the strength to love responsibly.

Teens who enjoy romance novels will thoroughly enjoy *Wake-Up Calls*.

Emily Asad