ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

We Can Still be Friends
Kelly Cherry
Soho Press
978-1-56947-323-8
(July 2003)

Ava Martel "knows what it means to be a woman scorned. What woman doesn't? And since she already knows everything she is about to feel, she thinks perhaps she should simply cut it off right now, all at once, like ripping a Band-Aid from a cut, and be done with it."

The book's title is a classic break-up line. Although Ava has heard the line before, something snaps when the handsome Tony Ferro uses it on her. They've been dating, and all of her fantasies led to marriage and a child once his divorce came through. Now Tony has dumped her for Claire, and Ava decides she needs to know more about this woman.

While Tony and Ava live in an academic community in Chicago, Boyd and Claire Buchanan live and work primarily in the Los Angeles area. Boyd has always been aware of his wife's beauty and her indiscretions. Having agreed to an open marriage, he's never acted upon his own impulses and is secretly pained by his wife's. After twenty-five years of marriage, they know which buttons to push; after all, they've programmed them. Boyd, who's beginning to feel a little too old to play this game, sighs resignedly as he watches the mating game between Claire and Tony.

Ava, finding her clarity of vision, discovers that she doesn't really care if she has Tony or marriage; what she really wants is a baby. The alarm on her biological clock has gone off and someone "owes" her a baby. She formulates a plan to meet Claire's husband for the purpose of becoming pregnant.

In addition to fiction, the author has published two memoirs and six collections of poetry, most recently *Rising Venus*. As in her earlier short story collections *My Life and Dr. Joyce Brothers* and *The Society of Friends*, she returns in this novel, her sixth work of fiction, to the themes of what constitutes family, the eternal battles between the sexes, and the quest for love, all of which she handles with aplomb.

The intersection of the lives of the four characters in *We Can Still be Friends* makes for a tender, wry, and sad look at the choices women make to "have it all," and the choices men make in the hopes of bringing happiness to the women they love. In lesser hands, it could have

succumbed to soap opera; Cherry creates four sympathetic characters worth revisiting. The novel is heart-wrenching and deeply satisfying.