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Where the Heart Lives: Book Two in the Milford-Haven Series

Mara Purl
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The publishing industry typically represents glitz as a function of metropolitan sophistication and Hollywood fame, yet in *Where the Heart Lives*, Mara Purl strategically presents a glamorous alternative to big-city vibrancy. In the second installment of her already popular Milford-Haven series, the California Central Coast is once again the locale for her magnetic cast of characters.

Set in the mid-1990s, *Where the Heart Lives* essentially explores displaced or discontented people pursuing their individual dreams. And it soon becomes clear that the ambitious residents of this getaway town lead lives as convoluted as those of any stressed-out city-dweller. Woven into Purl's evolving tale is the ongoing investigation of a missing television journalist, the search for a long-lost son given up for adoption, and the romance of emerging relationships in diverse walks of life.

Of particular interest is Miranda Jones, a gifted artist from an affluent San Francisco family. Rather than remain committed to the upscale gallery where her paintings sell, she follows her gut to achieve a deeper fulfillment in Milford-Haven. Seeking much more than monetary reward, Miranda listens to the dictates of her heart and allows spiritual motivation to guide her actions. With a passion for landscape and wildlife, Miranda interprets her own photography on canvas, an endeavor that exposure to her natural surroundings only enhances.

The contrast between a "should do" approach to living and a "must do" need to override one's so-called voice of reason is a significant thread running throughout this series, and is especially evident in Miranda, the most colorful character in this novel.

The artist's hidden attributes are often reflected in her own work, and allusions to her psyche frequently emerge in descriptive passages like this one: "The massive head-and-shoulders of a Siberian tiger hunched there, amber eyes staring back at her. Powerful … unconcerned … He might be seated in a docile pose—but he certainly isn't tamed."

Mara Purl is an award-winning author, screenwriter, and actress. In addition to her Milford-Haven novels and stories, her acclaimed *Milford-Haven, U.S.A.* was the first American radio drama licensed by the BBC in 1992.

Purl's success is based on her ability to appeal to readers on a more elevated level than traditional romance fiction generally prescribes. Though she never loses the common touch in her storytelling instincts, in every potential stereotype emerges a well-developed character with a standout personality.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (Winter 2013)

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