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MY DARLIN' QUARANTINE

Intimate Connections Created In Chaos

Elizabeth Stewart

Flandricka House Press (180 pp.)

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BOOK REVIEW

A collection of five vignettes portrays life in the age of Covid-19 quarantines.

In the spring of 2020, arts journalist Stewart, befuddled by the pandemic raging across the globe, laughed “at life’s new absurdities.” As a creative outlet, she began writing humorous tales starring quarantined strangers forced to interact with one another and to ultimately learn more about themselves through the “complexities offered by chaos.” The vignettes imagine a time in August 2020 when a second viral mutation emerges and the government distributes permanently locking bracelets to detect and track the infection. The Forget-Me-Not dive bar is the location for the first story, featuring a discreet regular whose bracelet flashes red and blurts out official warnings. The patrons and staff proceed to drink and become acquainted for their mandatory six-week quarantine. Elsewhere, the situation repeats at the Golden Pin-Up Salon, a gossipy, small-town beauty parlor where the beaming bracelets strike terror in the hearts of a feuding housewife and a distressed colorist. The same bright red beacons flash for other strangers who unexpectedly find themselves quarantining together at a rural Missouri dentist office, a Southern California BMW dealership, and the conference room of a prominent attorney. Once introduced, the heartwarming, character-driven tales progress through short chapter snippets. The cross-section of locales sets the scene for a diverse assortment of characters varying in age, race, and gender—and from all walks of life—who personify differing political persuasions, faiths, and perspectives on life and love. The author leaves no person unaffected or plotline dangling, as all of her players recognize, even if fleetingly, the power of human kindness and self-love. As she demonstrated in her advice book about possessions for parents with millennial children, *No Thanks Mom* (2017), Stewart exhibits a lust for life and parlays the lessons she’s learned throughout her travels into the engaging storylines of this cornucopia of worthy and addictive characters—with cute line drawings by Brallier included. Amusing and immediately relevant, the collection creates a world mired in uncertainty and turmoil but also a place where people can learn from others and become surprised by their capacity for change.

An entertaining, thought-provoking spin on rebooting the mind and heart while in quarantine.

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