

Cinnamon Beach

Suzanne Kamata

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In Suzanne Kamata's novel *Cinnamon Beach*, a man's death brings together the grieving women in his family for a summer of self-reflection and discovery.

To spread the final portion of Ted's ashes, his family gathers along the South Carolina shoreline. Ted's widow, Parisa, mourns as she oversees her growing fashion brand. Ted's sister, Olivia, arrives burdened by a secret divorce and a sabotaged career. And Sophie, Olivia's deaf daughter, looks forward to a future working with animals.

Alongside its focus on private family grief, *Cinnamon Beach* situates itself within contemporary events, making frequent references to COVID-19 and its concurrent political and cultural reckonings. Examining their lasting effects on present interpersonal intimacies, the story attends to race, multiculturalism, and biracial relationships while confronting death in the immediate family. Olivia, a white woman raised in America, remains embittered for being punished for fighting power harassment in academia in Japan. Sophie, whose biracial background often made her feel like an outsider, traverses multiple boundaries, learning American Sign Language alongside a biracial American medical student. Not all of the book's racial identity themes are equally fleshed out: while Olivia raises questions with a Black musician about racial preferences in dating, their conversation does not go beyond listing the races of their and their children's past partners, for example. In addition, the cultural and self-explorations among the women at the book's center are uneven: though Parisa acknowledges her white husband's occasional awkwardness relating to her Indian cultural upbringing, the sections that she narrates about her recollections, interiority, and grief fall away, becoming overshadowed by Olivia's and Sophie's concerns.

A quiet family drama, *Cinnamon Beach* depicts women coming to terms with death and their own identities in time with contemporary challenges.

ISABELLA ZHOU (July / August 2024)

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