

## Little Red Rider

**Audie Cockings**

Little Red Rider (Jun 2, 2014)

Softcover \$14.99 (370pp)

978-0-615-79830-1

*A spunky widow having psychic dreams leads the cast of realistic characters in this compelling debut.*

How does one mourn the past after discovering the gift of telling the future? Such is the strange dilemma facing fortysomething widow Prudence “Pea” Brandt after her beloved husband dies unexpectedly in a motorcycle accident. Audie Cockings’s compelling debut novel, *Little Red Rider*, is a superb meditation on the themes of grief, the redemptive power of love, and finding meaning after great loss.

Pea, her late husband, John, and their son, James, come across as a close-knit trio. With twentysomething James following in his late father’s footsteps to dangerous military hot spots, Pea struggles with grief and worry. When the clairvoyant dreams about potential terrorist plots begin, she turns to John’s former army buddies for help.

It’s empowering to watch Pea grow from a depressed widow into a rejuvenated woman with a new lease on life. Cockings’s depiction of lingering sorrow rings achingly true: “It seems too soon for people to be saying that I should be happy that [John’s] with the Lord...What an asinine thing to say.” Also, “My stage of grief is my business. I want to be sad by myself.” As time passes, though, Pea’s sorrow evolves in a realistic way, and she moves on without forgetting her husband. Pea makes amends with God, and Christians will appreciate the Brandts’ faith and regular church attendance.

Pea emerges as a resilient spitfire with a quick wit. Upon trying on her old clothes after losing weight while grieving, she remarks, “I look like a stick in a bag.” John, though deceased, remains very much a living character in the story. Simultaneously stoic, devilish, sexy, and protective, one can feel his love for Pea as he addresses her simply as “wife.” As for James, Cockings does a wonderful job of characterizing him as a doting son, though he spends much of the book overseas. Even the secondary characters—Pea’s well-meaning, meddling parents and John’s lovably annoying army friend, Allen—possess layers.

It seems as though two different books are attempted here: one a grieving widow’s reinvention of herself, the other a clairvoyant thriller of international scope. Character traits are also needlessly told and repeated, as their personalities shine through their actions. These missteps can be forgiven, though, in the wake of nuanced, likable characters and a poignant journey through loss.

Fans of spunky women and those who understand the experiences of being a military wife will enjoy this heartfelt novel.

JILL ALLEN (July 28, 2014)

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