



Love, Literally

J. T. Tierney

Curtiss Street Press

(238pp)

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Wordplay abounds in Love, Literally, a pandemic-set romance novel in which a couple meets in luxurious isolation.

In J. T. Tierney's quirky romance novel *Love, Literally*, two wordplay aficionados ride out the pandemic at a shared vacation home in Cape Cod.

Hallie is reeling from a streak of bad luck as COVID-19 rages. She, her best friend, Maria, and Maria's family are invited to shelter in place at Lisa and Paul's mansion in Cape Cod. Lisa and Paul also invite Quinn, a widowed professor whose skill with puns and obscure literary allusions piques Hallie's interest. The two are drawn together by their shared passion for words.

The prose is bright and fresh, featuring cheeky jokes and colorful similes that are hilarious and engaging. Where the book becomes more serious, though, it is stilted: Hallie and Quinn shift from lighthearted giggling to grim topics with jarring speed; as they get to know each other, their questions have an interview quality that dulls their mutual flirtation.

The perspective rotates between Hallie, Quinn, and Maria, with Hallie's voice proving to be the most memorable. She is boisterous and clever, and her tongue-in-cheek narration moves at a lively pace. However, some inconsistencies arise: she's established as an outspoken bisexual woman and an advocate for her African best friend, but she agrees with Quinn's "politically incorrect" complaint about intersectionality in an odd scene; thereafter, the topic is never brought up again.

Other characters do not shine like Hallie does. Though Quinn has a similar wit and sense of humor, he is more reserved, and his voice sometimes seems to be a pale imitation of hers. And Maria's few chapters are out of place and repetitive; she expresses discomfort with ostentatious affluence in a way that pulls attention from the central romance, which is substantive and interesting enough to carry the book on its own. Further, Lisa and Paul are not fleshed out much beyond their provision of the romantic backdrop of their mansion; they stir up occasional conflicts with their controversial opinions, and no common ground between them and their so-called friends is established.

The book's sense of place and time is also quite vague. Lisa and Paul's home and its charming surroundings are populated with a mix of cozy details, but its temporary residents oscillate between fretting about COVID-19 and mingling in public freely. In the end, the pandemic is rendered incidental—a mere excuse to bring the lovers together rather than a fleshed-out part of the plot.

Love, Literally is a lighthearted romance novel in which words bring a couple together in a powerful way.

JENNA LEFKOWITZ (June 4, 2024)

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