



Milwaukee Deep: An Ambrose Nobel Novel

Kirstie Croga

Subplot

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In the powerful thriller Milwaukee Deep, a woman discovers a troubling secret on a small island.

In Kirstie Croga's thriller *Milwaukee Deep*, trauma, resiliency, and revenge roil within a tight knit island community.

Ambrose is no stranger to hardship. A childhood sexual assault survivor, she navigates her adult life through the lens of safety, even knowing that the world is not a safe place. She practices boxing and fighting techniques, works from home as a professional ghostwriter, and keeps her heart guarded.

Then an assignment to write the story of a Puerto Rican family piques her suspicious tendencies. Ambrose learns about a rash of deaths in the 1940s on Vieques that were attributed to tuberculosis; the accounts are inconsistent. Upon further research and with the help of two friends, Ambrose flies to Vieques to learn more. She finds that the island is lush, and that its community is wise and unbreakable. Still, this beautiful place is haunted because of chemical and nuclear waste and political tugs-of-war. When the American military steps in to halt her investigation, she questions all that she knows about truth, healing, and surviving.

Ambrose is a headstrong, tenacious heroine who harnesses her responses to trauma as protective strengths. She often points out to others that survivors aren't broken, the system is. As hints of her background are shared, and as she navigates her relationships with others, she is compelling. She is fleshed out further with quirks, such as her penchant for debating the meanings of people's words. And she is as intentional in her actions and observations as she is when it comes to her verbiage. Her descriptions of people and places are concise but evocative; she is observant and quick to form opinions. The latter quality serves her well as she traverses the island and investigates its particular mysteries, though it also causes tension in her love life.

Addressing themes of retribution, nature's power, and human folly throughout its pages, this is a fast-moving story. Though it holds attention thanks to its succinct prose and tendency to include contemporary details (people communicate face-to-face but also via text and instant messaging applications), its resolution is somewhat more abrupt. Still, as Ambrose works to understand the consequences of all that has transpired, both within herself and in her relationships, there are surprises and suggestions of karma worth enjoying in the grim but sensual conclusion.

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LEAH WEBSTER (March 21, 2023)

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