

Remember My Beauties

Lynne Hugo

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This is a lyrical, down-to-earth snapshot of a pocket of flawed humanity.

Remember My Beauties, by Lynne Hugo, chronicles the hauntingly poetic crumbling of a horse-breeding family as a woman struggles to cope with buried secrets, rebellious children, and caring for the family's beloved horses.

In the idyllic Kentucky pastures, an elderly horse breeder and his wife refuse anyone's care but that of their hardworking daughter, Jewel. Jewel, however, is dealing with her own issues, including a drug-addicted daughter and her own slightly unstable mental health. Jewel attempts to care for everyone around her without losing herself in the meantime, but eventually she throws in the towel, and the family falls into disarray. That is, until her malcontent brother and scheming second husband step in. Before long, the bonds that connect each of these colorful characters are tested and strengthened.

Hugo paints her characters lovingly, with deep flaws and quirks that make them all the more real. When describing a fight between Jewel and her daughter, Jewel states that the daughter spews complaints as if "she were being paid by the word," but Jewel retorts, "I've never charged for sarcasm, since it comes to me so naturally." Shifting points of view can be disconcerting but are also used to strong effect: Jewel's husband comes off as an oaf until his added perspective is shown to round him out. Not all the characterization is positive, as there are some dark secrets hanging in the family closet, including molestation, incest, and other trauma. Those flaws, however, help flesh out this family and make for an engaging read.

Remember My Beauties is a lyrical and down-to-earth snapshot of unsympathetic characters who, because they are so clearly defined and motivated, become captivating and heart-achingly beautiful. A pocket of flawed humanity bound by the love of innocent animals elevates this story that shines a light on the value of family, love, and the connections that keep everything on a steady trot.

JOHN M. MURRAY (Summer 2016)

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