



Heart of a Dove

Abbie Williams

The Civil War has ended, leaving the country with a gaping wound. Lorie Blake, a southern orphan sold into prostitution at fifteen, has carefully guarded her aching soul from the disgrace forced upon her every evening. Two years have passed, leaving her with little hope of anything more. Meanwhile, three men – longtime friends – and a young boy with a heart of gold are traveling northward, planning to rebuild their lives in the north and leave behind the horrors of their time as soldiers in the Confederate Army.

Fate, however, has plans of its own, causing their lives to collide in a river town whorehouse. Forced to flee, Lorie escapes and joins them on the journey north. But danger stalks them all in the form of a vindictive whorehouse madam and an ex-Union soldier, insane and bent on exacting revenge. At last, Lorie must come to terms with her past and devastating secrets that she cannot yet bear to reveal.

Heart of a Dove is the first book in a gripping, sweeping romantic saga of pain, unbearable choices, loss and true love set against the backdrop of a scarred, post-Civil War America.

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"Set just after the U.S. Civil War, this passionate opening volume of a projected series successfully melds historical narrative, women's issues, and breathless romance with horsemanship, trailside deer-gutting, and alluring smidgeons of Celtic ESP." ~ Publishers Weekly

"This story haunted me so much I gave up trying to sleep and just finished it. It's beautifully done, even those miserable moments that were painful to follow. We experience everything through Lorie's point of view, including the charm of her Southern roots through flashback memories as well as the rigors of the travel through the prairie. Her relationship with the three men and the young Malcolm was special, her burgeoning romance with one of them extraordinary." ~ The Book Nympho

Discussion Questions

1. What influence does Lorie's past have upon her current life? Does her loving upbringing help or hinder her existence as a prostitute?
2. The Civil War happened in the 1860s, and yet its impact upon the social, political/economical, and even emotional wellbeing of the United States is still felt today. How do the events of the Civil War still negatively affect the United States?
3. It's interesting that the author chose to create characters that lived in the South, rather than the North – do you humanize or vilify these Southerners?
4. There are some brutal events described and actions taken in the story. Are these events and actions justified?
5. How have Lorie's experiences as a prostitute changed her perception of other people? What important lessons has she learned from the three years spent at Ginny's?

*Abbie Williams has been addicted to love stories ever since first sneaking her mother's copy of *The Flame and the Flower*. An avid lover of language, history and women's studies, when she isn't writing, teaching, or taking care of her busy family, you can find her hanging out on the dock, listening to some good bluegrass music.*



Interview with Abbie Williams

How did you get the idea for the story in *Heart of a Dove*?

I have always been fascinated by the era of the American West, both the mythology and the actual history. I am most especially intrigued by the women involved. I believe they were brave, strong, courageous and capable in ways we cannot even imagine. What they suffered through, and how they are often subsequently vilified or reviled, makes my soul ache. I want to learn everything I can about this era, these women, and their lives, and give them a voice. It's a small thing, but it is something tangible that I can do as a writer.

Which character in the book would you most/least like to have dinner with?

Oh, definitely Malcolm Carter is the one I would MOST want to have dinner with – and here is why: So one evening this boy blazed into my story in a lightning flash, completely unanticipated. Initially, when I was first writing *Heart of a Dove*, I had created four characters who would accompany Lorie after she flees Ginny's (the whorehouse where she is a prisoner.) I envisioned them as four grown men, former soldiers, rough around the edges, but in a sexy, appealing way. However, as I wrote, I realized that one of the men was not a man at all but instead a boy, whose voice flowed so clearly in my mind that I can hear him as plain as you would someone speaking directly into your ear. He has popped into my dreams a time or two as well, with all the forthright attitude he possesses in my book. It's enough to make you start fully believing in ghosts.

How did you research this era?

Because I love reading, researching the 1860s and 70s was not only fascinating, but fully enjoyable. I prefer specialized research books that go into great depth – such as a book focusing specifically on clothing fabrics, eyeglasses, wagons, or horses. Since horses play an important role in the book, I read a great deal about them, and was fortunate enough to be able to spend time at my mother's farm, hanging out with her horses. I love conducting hands-on research whenever possible. I read books about the conditions inside whorehouses – the farther west and the less established the city or town, typically the rougher the circumstances. Some of it made me cringe in horror, but I feel as though if these women had the courage to live through it, the least I can do is read about it.

Have you always loved writing?

Yes – writing has always been an integral part of who I am. From the time I was a little girl, I filled notebooks with stories, written longhand. I was nearly finished with high school before we had a computer in the house – what a gift it was to be able to edit on a computer screen, rather than erasing and rewriting (literally!) on lined paper. And the late 19th century has always been a time period of intense fascination for me – I spent hours reading such amazing authors as Larry McMurtry and Lucia St. Clair Robson, which sparked my imagination and fired up my spirit – I knew that I wanted to write about the people who lived and died in this era, too.

Is there anything else you want to add or say to your readers?

Definitely keep envisioning and pursuing your dreams! If you don't like something, change it and try a new path. And don't use the words "slut" and "whore" in reference to women. When researching prostitution for my books, I studied the etymology of these words and discovered so many captivating things that I couldn't explain short of a book-length work. People should not defame each other in that way – especially when both words have a long history of keeping women powerless, marginalized and unduly ashamed.