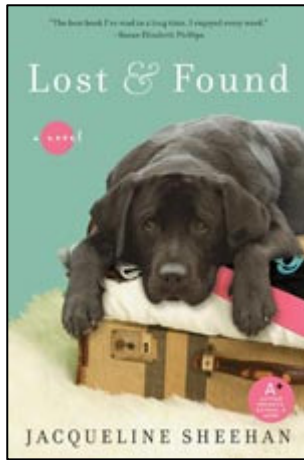


Readin' & Writin' with Lauraine- January 2008



I usually choose this month to review a self-help book to start the New Year off with good intentions, but I found a novel that grabbed my heart instead. This book is by a new author. No one recommended the book to me, nor did it come in my mail, but the black lab that looks more chocolate on the cover pleaded, "Buy me, read this book."

You might have realized by now that I am a sucker for dog stories...well, animal stories in general. You may remember my review of *The Good Good Pig*, still a favorite, recommended many times. The spotted pig on the cover hooked me that time. However Labradors have a handle on soulful eyes.

So I bought *Lost & Found* by Jacqueline Sheehan, her first novel and one I will recommend over and over. How can you miss with a woman psychologist recently widowed who runs away to an island hopefully to heal, and discovers a big Labrador Retriever with an arrow in his shoulder who is obviously missing someone?

Rocky, the heroine takes on the job of animal control warden on this island at the beginning of winter when all the summer folks are gone. Enter other engaging characters: a young girl choosing anorexia, a woman who signs on to befriend Rocky in spite of herself, and a man who teaches archery. And of course Lloyd, the lab who has a few chapters in his own point of view, another bit of this book that I especially liked.

Have you ever had to eat your words? As a psychologist mired in grief, Rocky has to do that too. She realizes all her previous counseling on grieving didn't begin to plumb the mires that grab those still living after the death of someone close. She learns that the mind plays tricks on you. Family and friends don't, or aren't able to be a whole lot of help, and time distorts. She has to eat her words. As we all know, eating our own words is not much for palatable fare.

But that necessity sure can make for a great basis for a novel. Turning life experiences into a story is something many of us do on a regular basis. Telling someone else what happened can be entertaining, stress reducing and healing. A homily I learned long ago said: "a sorrow shared is cut in half, while a joy shared is doubled". Think what a great theme that would be for a novel or short story.

Theme is the heart of a story, what it's all about after the characters are done and gone. Some stories have more than one theme. My books are often based around forgiveness between people. So many families and friendships are ripped apart because people don't want to forgive a mistake. Or people can't forgive themselves. What themes have come to mean a great deal to you?

I loved *Aesop's Fables* as a child and found them again not too long ago: The contest between the wind and the sun to get a man to take off his coat, the tortoise and the hare, the ant and the grasshopper. While many morals are not as obvious as those in these tales, still the best books have universal themes that resonate with readers of all ages, whether they realize it or not. *Lost & Found* is just this sort of book, and one worth reading.

Hope you have a stack of TBR books near your chair or by your bed. With winter here surely you'll find more time to read, especially with the sun going to bed so early.

Happy New Year and until next time,

Happy Readin' and Writin' from Lauraine