

Book review: 'The Lake of Dreams' by Kim Edwards

ANALYSIS

By JOY TIPPING / Staff Writer

Dallas Morning News, 14 January 2011 02:02 PM

Kim Edwards' debut novel, *The Memory Keeper's Daughter* in 2006, whooshed like a tsunami through the literary landscape, becoming a huge best-seller and earning fierce loyalty among her readers. Edwards followed *Memory Keeper* with republication of her 1997 collection of short stories, *The Secrets of a Fire King*, which was well-received but not nearly as popular as *Memory Keeper*; fans were clearly waiting for the next novel.

They can rejoice: *The Lake of Dreams* is finally here, and it's a doozy, although it lacks the emotional heft that made readers clasp *Memory Keeper* to their hearts. Still, it's gorgeously written and, for a book with a mystery at its core, refreshingly introspective.

Like Elizabeth Kostova (*The Swan Thieves*), Edwards is an author who's not afraid to linger and pause, to let a character sit with a thought or problem and work it out on the page. You won't find car chases here or pounding suspense, but patient readers will come away with human insight worthy of a psychology text and a lot more interesting to read.

As in *Memory Keeper*, a family secret drives *Lake of Dreams*, a puzzle that goes back generations and traces its roots to a collection of intertwined circumstances. Among them are the 1910 appearance of Halley's comet; the suffragist movement in upstate New York; and the burgeoning early 20th-century industry in the Finger Lakes region, with glassworks taking the lead, both workaday glass and stained art glass in the tradition of Louis Comfort Tiffany and John La Farge.

The story is set in fictional Lake of Dreams, one of a bevy of hamlets strung like beads along the Finger Lakes. Heroine Lucy Jarrett, in her late 20s, returns home from Japan, where she's living with her boyfriend, Yoshi. Lucy has spent her young adulthood moving frequently, state to state, country to country, refusing to perch anywhere for long.

Once at her mom's lake house, Lucy gets quickly drawn back into family drama. There's a hint of Hamlet, with Lucy's not-so-beloved Uncle Art assuming much of what she considers her father's rightful place (he died years ago in a boating accident), and also strain over her mother's new romance and ongoing friction with her brother and cousins. She's also shaken by renewed proximity to glass artisan Keegan Fall, who was her teenage romance.

When Lucy discovers some old letters and pamphlets and a swath of beautifully woven cloth, tucked away in a window seat, it leads her back in time to ancestors she'd never heard of: Rose Jarrett and her daughter Iris. Rose, it seems, may have been the model for a series of glorious stained-glass windows that Keegan is restoring for the local church. But why were she and Iris expunged from the family history?

There are almost too many issues to keep up with here: women's rights, American Indian rights, artistic integrity, family squabbles (and possible murder, it turns out), the tug of freedom vs. the comfort of familiarity.

Edwards' book is much like her plot-central piece of cloth that was woven with interlocking moons and vines: It's busy, and it's complicated, but as a finished, carefully woven product, it turns into something luminously beautiful.

The Lake of Dreams

Kim Edwards

(Viking, \$26.96)

Plan your life

Kim Edwards will appear 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Dallas Museum of Art, 1717 N. Harwood St., Dallas, as part of Arts & Letters Live. Tickets cost \$37 general admission; discounts for students, seniors, book groups and members of Friends of the Dallas Public Library. 214-922-1818. www.tickets.dallasmuseumofart.org.