



Heartwood

Catherine Lane

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All Nikka thinks about is making partner in the law firm she works for. So, when the firm sends her to the Springs, a women's resort town and home of famous lesbian author Beth Walker, Nikka jumps at the chance to prove herself to her sexy boss, Lea.

But nothing in the Springs is as it seems. Beth is hiding secrets about her mysterious past with movie star Dawn Montgomery. Lea may only be out for her own gain and keeping Beth a prisoner in her own home. And the only person who might see the truth of the situation is adorably impulsive Maggie.

Will Nikka stay true to her life's ambition, or will she dare look into the mystery—and into her own heart?

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Heartwood Details

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From Reader Review Heartwood for online ebook

Jem says

Heartwood is a tale of two couples whose fates intertwine when one of the women, a lawyer, is sent to an out-of-the-way women's resort town to oversee a major literary event featuring the town's best tourist attraction: reclusive lesbian author Beth Walker, whose fame and air of mystery the town has been capitalizing on for decades. Beth, now in her seventies, lives in a secluded house surrounded by a live-in nurse and a personal chef.

Nikka, the lawyer, is highly driven, ambitious and supremely organized. Her daily routine starts with the day's to-do list, crossing off things on said to-do list, and ends with making the next day's to-do list. Her single-minded goal in life is to make partner in her law firm. And every move she makes is meticulously calculated to bring her closer to that goal.

Maggie is a creative pastry chef with lots of ideas and recipes. But talent doesn't equate to job security when you've just broken up with your gf/boss. She got a job offer as the famous Beth Walker's personal chef, but it comes with an unusual condition: Never Ask Questions. Saying yes is easy, but when she discovers that Beth is barely eating, she can't help but question why. But a history of impulsiveness, acting-before-thinking and hatching conspiracy theories make wary people think she's crying wolf.

Maggie soon figures out her best bet is to convince Nikka. But Nikka's working for the dark side. Not to mention the fact that she's the complete opposite of Maggie--logical, methodical and needing to make a thousand charts before arriving at a decision. Maggie realizes the urgency of the situation, as Beth's lawyers and her publisher, are already getting ready to launch the literary event of the decade: a previously undiscovered work of the author. If only Nikka would take a leap of faith.

That plot alone should be able to convince anyone to read this book. Who doesn't love conspiracy theories? After the first chapter, it's impossible not to pick up on the fact that the plot is derived from the real life controversy surrounding the release of Harper Lee's second book. This book takes that and builds on it to weave an exciting and believable tale worthy of...the best internet conspiracy theories around. What's more impressive is that that's just half of the book. The other half, is the completely unexpected and surprisingly intense love story of Beth and a woman who is a popular actress of her day. It is a story of innocence and betrayal, of restrained longing and forbidden love. The two plot threads (past and present) share equal prominence, and are laid out in alternate chapters which is very effective in building anticipation and keeping the pages turning.

I was totally absorbed in Beth and Dawn's story. Their characterizations are spot-on. Beth is the picture of small-town innocence, completely smitten with the dazzling beauty of the actress. The story of their push/pull attraction lights up most of the first half of the book. And makes for some of the most intense and emotional scenes throughout. I loved how the author imbued the character of Dawn with such complex layers, and how its slowly revealed over time. She is mostly seen through the eyes of Beth, so is such an enigma throughout. And because she is an actress, we're never really sure if she's 'acting' or for real, and that adds immensely to that undercurrent of sexual tension in their chapters. There's a rather quiet scene that I found truly unforgettable. (view spoiler)

Despite the prominent blurb mention, Nikka and Maggie's story take somewhat of a back seat until the storytelling switches permanently to the present. Like the previous pair, I thought the author also hit the ball

out of the park with these two characterizations. Maggie as the whirling dervish and Nikka as the deliberate, obsessive list-maker makes for a woefully incompatible but wonderfully endearing pairing. Great character development as their adventure gets underway, and they learn to adjust to each other's temperament and pace.

I liked the contrast in tone when the two plot threads alternate. Beth/Dawn's is earnest and emotional, Nikka/Maggie's is lighter and more adventurous. The latter feels like a refreshing breath of air after holding your breath underwater.

The emotional part of me would have liked both stories to be a longer. Especially Dawn/Beth. They were literally (view spoiler) Also, Nikka/Maggie's ending could have used a few pages more. But, brevity does make for a more powerful book. Sometimes.

4.85 stars

ARC from Ylva

Penny says

3.5

I really wish we could've seen more of Maggie and Nikka, especially since they're my favorite type of paring: the adorable girl with the contrived lawyer.

Velvet Lounger says

3.5 stars

A well written and complex plot of then and now. 1960's and Beth, the small town girl, falls head over heels for the cosmopolitan – and straight – Hollywood star, Dawn. Present day and renowned author Beth is a recluse locked away in her mansion, but her cook, Maggie, thinks something is wrong with her care.

Maggie has always gotten in trouble for her mad imagination, so it is going to be a struggle to convince anyone of a conspiracy, especially the buttoned up and controlled lawyer, Nikka, sent to stop the town's small businesses using Beth's books as a tourist attraction.

A mix of old fashioned love story and a tragedy, Ms Lane cleverly weaves two romances throughout the beginning of the book and gradually brings them together for a charming denouement. While complex, the mix of voices and timelines is well done and easy to follow and the author manages to clearly differentiate the accepted social mores of the time without having to lecture.

It's an interesting tale, meshing the then and now, merging the lives of the women, and offering us a range of complex and powerful characters. Each one of the players is well portrayed, but Maggie and Nikka are

particularly sympathetically drawn. 1960's Beth's naiveté and fear make her rather painful to read, and Dawn is self centered. Perhaps the intolerance of the time justifies her behavior, but on a personal level her scheming is simply cruel. They create their own tragedy.

"Heartwood" is well written and edited, it has humour and pathos, moments of joy and yet a deep life altering tragedy. The conspiracy is tenable and while some of the bit players are rather stereotypical others, notably the characters of the modern day town, are rendered with obvious affection. Josie is particularly adorable and I would love to know more of her story in a whole other novel.

And yet, the tale of 'then' didn't grab me. I liked the plot concept and how it was done, but I didn't like Dawn, I found 1960's Beth annoying, and without giving a spoiler her inaction in the aftermath of the pivotal crisis did not ring true and felt contrived. For me, her deep flaw, then and now, was rather simplistically depicted. I loved the Maggie and Nikka storyline, however, and look forward to reading more from this obviously talented author.

BookFiend17 says

Heartwood is my first read by Catherine Lane and I absolutely enjoyed it! I loved reading about young Beth and her relationship with Dawn and then jumping to show us Beth years later. I honestly don't know which part was my favorite, I just liked it all! Maybe not some of the actions of our "villains" but honestly enjoyed it from page one. I hope to read more by Catherine Lane and would highly recommend Heartwood.

Ameliah Faith says

My 300th Review!!

Heartwood is the story of Beth and Dawn and Nikka and Maggie, past and present. In 1960 Beth loved Dawn so much that she wrote a story based on their love. The book became a cult it and many women throughout the decades prize it for helping them realize the truth about themselves. Fast forward to the present. Beth is now a recluse who relies on her law firm to manage her affairs, including a live in nurse. Maggie is hired to be Beth's personal chef but is not allowed to get anywhere near the author. She feels there is something really wrong but has no way to confirm it. Meanwhile Nikka is an up and coming star in the law firm that handles Beth's affairs. Lea, her boss, is the one responsible for keeping the writer off limits. Nikka accidentally sees Beth and knows something is up. Can Nikka and Maggie get to the bottom of the mystery or will they both be exiled from the estate and their jobs? Who is the girl with the cherry blossom tattoo?

I've been a fan of Ms Lane's since her very first story. She has a beautiful, emotional style to her writing that I just can not stay away from. Heartwood is a darker novel with more depth and substance than her previous books. Her characters are so easy to care for. Whether you love them or hate them or fear them, you will care. I very much enjoyed having two stories that merged into one. There is so much more time to get to know the characters and see why they behave the way they do. I found myself falling for Young Beth. Her story is very bittersweet and memorable...sigh.

The apprehension the mystery caused was just divine, who doesn't love to worry about the safety of the leads? I love how Ms Lane can make me scared for the "good" gals (vs the "evil" ones), excited about the events, I was heartbroken, happy, relieved and finally contented with a big smile on my face. I commend Ms

Lane for stretching her wings in this novel and I hope you will care for the book as much as I do.

Agirlcandream says

I liked the whole Harper Lee feel to this novel. Not in a To Kill a Mockingbird sense but more in a Go Set a Watchman vibe. I love a clever evil character and Maggie's boss Lea (and Vivienne) fit that bill, almost to a comical level of nasty. Nikka and Maggie are earnest and the obvious future love interests in the novel but my heart went out to the couple in the past, to Beth and Dawn.

The strength of this novel is in the scenes set in the Sixties as Beth attempts to defy her parents and discovers her true self in the arms of Dawn. Those chapters were beautiful and heartfelt. They are Technicolor beauties and made the present day events pale in comparison.

May we never forget the challenges faced by women who loved women in less enlightened times.

JulesGP says

Reading this book was like unwrapping a gift where the cardboard box is labeled as something you know is pretty good but then you look inside and something different is actually in there that completely blows you away.

It's 1960 and 22 yr old Beth Walker is living the small town life when movie stars Dawn and Jimmy Montgomery move to town and alter Beth's life forever. Fast forward 55 years to the same town, local Maggie Chalon is hired to be famous author Beth Walker's personal chef. But something's not right and when powerhouse lawyer Lea Truman blasts into the house followed by her ambitious, young associate Nikka Vaskin, Maggie does what she does best, jumps headlong into the mystery.

Two stories, past and present day, intertwining at key moments that push the narrative forward but never bumble into each other's way. Humor and romance, villains and heroes. Fast moving. A beautiful setting in the redwoods and a quirky small town. There's never a wasted character. The 4 mc's are so good but Dawn and Beth's story just took my breath away, old fashioned and romantic, heart hurting but buffered by the modern day freedom of Maggie and Nikka.

A very enjoyable book.

Loek Krancher says

WoW, what an outstanding, compelling story!

Nikka is finding her way to become a partner in a law firm and Maggie, a personal chef and pastry chef, need to work together to save her. Maggie isn't a professional crime solver but when her gut tells her that something is terrible wrong, she jumps in with her whole heart and without thinking. She asks her brother for help, but he refused to believe her. Maggie is etching to find proof that her suspicions are valid. This is only the beginning of Maggie's problems and no good could come from her digging around. Will Nikka help her

or is she too afraid to lose everything? Something is obviously going on and the question is, is foulplay involved? Things get really dicey if a press conference is held in Fern House. This is one book with two beautiful love stories. Not two stand-alone stories but two stories that can not live without each other. The plotline is excellent executed. The main characters are well drawn and you will love them. The scenes with the box in the walk-in-closet, and the diary are heartbreaking. The story is very well written, very exciting and keeps your attention. My compliments to the author for this outstanding story.

Corporate Slave says

Incredible read!

Lynn Lawler says

You are going to want to pick this one up and read. See my review at <https://lynnlawler.blogspot.com/2016/...>

Colleen Corgel says

This is one of the better split timeline stories that I have read in the lesfic genre. I enjoyed almost all aspects of the story and that it gives you just enough on the early time line to understand what happens at the end of the book.

So here's the rundown: Nikka is a corporate lawyer (Intellectual property) who is tasked with managing the reclusive Beth Walker, the author of the groundbreaking lesbian fiction book, *Heartwood*. After literally running into Maggie, Beth's personal chef, and Nikka eventually meets up with Maggie again at Beth's estate. They know something's wrong, but they just can't place it. They each circle around each other as the case gets wilder and wilder, before learning the truth of the inspiration for the novel that drove Beth into stardom.

Interwoven with the legal plot is the flashback story of Beth. This was such a heartbreaking story, and brings back memories of the doomed lovers tropes from classic literature. If Lane had stayed in the present, I don't think this story would have the same emotional strength.

Compelling characters, two strong stories, and the lovely settings make this book a great romantic read.

Tiff says

Heartwood by Catherine Lane is an exquisite story that will stay with you long after you've finishing reading this one. This multifaceted story weaves a tale of star-crossed lovers of the past and a new love that is just developing. Two stories in one that are weaved together for an unforgettable tale of hope, happiness and perseverance.

The Past – 1960: Beth Walker is a young woman from quaint Steelhead Springs. Beth has never left her hometown, but she has an imagination like no other. Beth, a gifted writer who has only just begun to acknowledge her skill with a pen, spends her day working in a real estate office and spends all her other time writing. Enter, Dawn Montgomery, a famous actress from Hollywood who just one day shows up in Beth's town with her husband in tow, ready to buy the most remote home possible. Beth and Dawn develop an almost instant friendship. You see Dawn's husband has left for his next movie and Beth becomes Dawn's constant companion. These two have this dynamic relationship that just draws you in. The story is told purely from Beth's perspective and you can really feel how she is totally enamored with Dawn. Dawn is the epitome of complex. You cannot help but have an internal debate of is she playing Beth for a fool or has she fallen under love's spell as well.

The Present Day: Maggie Chalon is Beth Walker's, now in her seventies, personal chef. The crazy thing is she has never met the famed writer. Hired by Beth's lawyer, Maggie makes Beth's meals every day, most of which are barely touched. Vivienne, the nurse from Hell, reminds Maggie of her place and that she should stop asking questions on Beth Walker's health. Maggie cannot let it go. She knows without a shadow of a doubt that something nefarious is going on, and why is Beth Walker never to be seen.

Nikka Vaskin is an up and coming lawyer at Truman and Steinbrecker. Work is her everything, she has everything to prove and has a timeline in place for her rise on the career ladder. A chance moment throws her into the path of Beth Walker and Maggie Chalon. This is when craziness ensues, and Nikka working for the enemy, has to look beyond the facts and take a giant leap of faith to find out if the impulsive and highly attractive Maggie might be on to something.

The book switches seamlessly from past to present day, telling the two stories with such emotion and detail you are catapulted into the story. I found myself hanging on every word, desperately cheering for both couples. Catherine Lane develops characters that reach right off the page and steal your heart. To say this is a great book is by far an understatement!

Dee says

4.5 stars

This is the first book I've read by this author and wow does she have a way with words. The vivid and emotional writing style submerged me right in the middle of this drama, slash love story, slash mystery!

From very early on it becomes apparent something extremely wrong is going on behind closed doors. But what? I'm loathed to reveal too much about the plot for fear of giving anything away. I will say all is not as it seems.

Although this story is of a time gone by, the forbidden love of Beth and Dawn, and the present day blossoming attraction between Nikka and Maggie, the pace between past and present was perfectly spaced out. It allowed me time to become totally invested in all characters without getting reader whiplash, or worse lost in the timeline! My heart broke for Beth and Dawn, and I kept wondering who the mysterious tattooed girl was, Maggie stole the show for me. Gosh damn... I want a Maggie.

While sex is far from central to the plot, there's a little spice for those who enjoy such, I'm one of those readers. I tip my hat to Ms Lane for writing one of the most sensual, sexy scenes I've encountered in lesbian

fiction! She goes to show you can word things in such a beautiful way that a person can see and feel where fingers are going without having explicit names for the genitalia thrown in your face. Not that I mind that from time to time. But yeah, subtlety sometimes works best.

I could rave and rave about all the things I loved about this story, but rather than do so I'd encourage you to pickup a copy and decide for yourself how good it is, I highly doubt you'll be disappointed.

I recommend Heartwood to everyone who enjoys a good mystery, well developed plot, and characters you'll be rooting for.

Copy provided in exchange for an honest review

Aj Smith says

I really enjoyed the book but the name bothered me; first of all there are well over fifty other book with the same name on goodreads alone, secondly and more importantly in plant anatomy the heartwood of a tree branch is dead. For a book that deals with the idea of love carrying on through thick and thin and has the giant redwood as a key symbol running throughout the various timelines in the text, it just seems like an odd choice. Then again maybe I'm reading too much into it!

Anyway, now that I've dealt with that I can get to the good stuff. Heartwood features at least four different narratives that I can discern; firstly that of Nikka Vaskin the young intellectual property lawyer trying to impress her boss Lea Truman, who's most famous client is the reclusive writer Beth Walker. Nikka's point of view is interspersed with that of Maggie, pastry chef extraordinaire but currently working as Beth's cook, though she's never seen the woman herself. These narratives are cut with chapters set in the past recounting a young Beth's tentative first forays into the world of writing and most importantly the day she met Hollywood actress Dawn Montgomery, who became not only the object of her affections but also her first audience for her stories.

I don't want to give too much away but all is not as it seems, in both the present or the past and hidden diaries and letters contain secrets many people would pay good money for, while others would do anything to keep them hidden.

Other than my issues with the name, absolutely excellent and beautifully written!

Tara says

Two timelines mean all the tags!

Heartwood by Catherine Lane is the second book from this author, and a huge departure from her super cute debut, the contemporary sports romance The Set Piece. Heartwood has two stories threaded together—one in the present and one in the 1960s—both driving toward an intense climax and a satisfying ending.

Heartwood is so different from The Set Piece that I almost couldn't believe they were written by the same author, and I mean that in the best possible sense. Catherine Lane's writing has grown by leaps and bounds between the two books, which makes me excited to see what she has for us next. Balancing the storytelling between two stories, revealing pieces of information at the right time, pacing everything just right to keep the reader interested in both narratives is no small feat, and she did it just right. I found myself torn between rushing to the end and savouring every second, and I was a very happy reader by the end of the book.

Full review: <http://www.thelesbianreview.com/heart...>
