



Houdini Heart

Ki Longfellow

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HOUDINI HEART harkens back to the masters of suspenseful supernatural horror: Poe, Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson, but speaks with a wholly fresh voice. Once caught in its pages, there's no escaping Longfellow's terrible tale. Weeks ago, she was one of Hollywood's biggest writers, wed to one of its greatest stars. The doting mother of their golden child. But now? She's alone, tortured by a horrifying secret no woman could bear. Pursued by those she can't outrun, anguished by a guilt she can't endure, and driven close to madness, she flees to the one place she's ever called home: a small town in Vermont where River House still stands. To a child, the splendid hotel was mysterious and magical and all its glamorous guests knew delicious secrets. Cocooned in its walls, she will write one last book. Her atonement? Or her suicide note? But life is never as you dream it, and River House isn't what she'd always imagined it was. Intense, literary, and harrowing, Houdini Heart is a tale of bone-chilling horror, emotional torment, and psychological terror. Gripped by River House, trapped in an aging hotel of mirrors only Houdini could escape, how much can haunt a mind before it too is only a thing once imagined? "A haunting and disturbing journey through the psyche."-Erika Mailman, Author of "The Witch's Trinity"

Houdini Heart Details

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From Reader Review Houdini Heart for online ebook

DoorMatt says

Slyly captivating and insidiously disturbing. It's deceptively light conversational style (like the best of Stephen King) suckered me right in and before I knew it, pages flying by, I was deep into this masterfully written supernatural psychodrama, like M R James by way of Patricia Highsmith. A night-dark and utterly convincing depiction of a mind unravelling, leavened by genuine wit and compassion and made all the more compelling by a beautifully rendered central character who I couldn't help but be both captivated and appalled by. I felt quite nuts myself by the end! There are two absolutely gruesome moments (which I won't spoiler here) where I had to stop (I can't remember the last time I had to do that) and a gloriously insane WTF moment at the end. This is also a book of subtle richness that yields even more on a second, more measured, read. This book will stay with me for a loooooooooong time.

Giedre says

As I think Sondra said in the review of this book, every reader will understand this book in his own way.

I have just finished it and I am gobsmacked. Not only because of the book itself, but how it managed to creep under my skin, seep into my brain and affect my everyday life while I was reading it. Now I don't mean to sound dramatic or easily influenced, but I suppose it's part of each reader understanding the book based on their own experiences.

First of all, the writing is fantastic, it's so easy to read, so so easy! It flows, it reads itself without you having to put effort into reading. There are layers, intentional or unintentional, there are sentences where I thought the author was trying to be 'cool' and 'hip' and overly simplistic and cliché and I didn't like it at all but then.. I don't think that was the intention at all. I hope it wasn't. I hope Ki Longfellow is perhaps too clever to do that. Now I've not read any of her other books yet (they are there on my Kindle waiting for their turn) so Houdini Heart was my introduction to this author, and this is why I gave it 4 stars. In case other books are more.. I don't know... More enjoyable, better? There's nothing wrong with Houdini Heart for me not to give it 5 stars and I might change the rating shortly. But for now, it's 4 stars. 4 and a half if I could. I'm looking forward to see if her writing style and language is different in other books.

I agree with everything other reviewers have said, with their ideas and views (which is unusual) because their guesses are as good as mine.

I didn't think it was a horror book, I didn't find it scary as such, not because of all the blood or secrets, the girl, the old woman and a dog, not because of Windigo hiding in the woods (I read about Windigo after I read the book, but by then I knew what it was anyway) however it's psychological side reminded me of Stephen King books, when something just gets into your mind... And sits there..knocking and reminding of its presence occasionally. Like the old woman knocking on the door at night. It scared me because it made me sad. I wanted to be left alone while I read it, and when I wasn't reading I was feeling so so sad, because it was a story of me, of everyone here who lost those who they loved, of those who live with someone who are running from themselves, of those who are trying to go home to safety but it just wakes something insane, of those who think they make right choices... And yet it's a story of someone who is a creation of Ki's imagination. Or is it? She loved a big star, she lived and created together...

I think Houdini Heart is so popular and reaches so many of us because it really is a story of each and every one of us little madness and search for escape.

I've finished the book only half an hour ago, there's still much for me to think and rethink about and guess and find answers to. So I'll finish here and will come back when emotions and impressions settle a bit. Or when I find answers and want to share them.

It is a great book for everyone, those who want a life drama, those who want horror, those who want hauntings, those who want a different read, those who want a book that's easy to read, those who like questions, everyone.

And at the same time I can see why someone would not enjoy the book. It's not really a horror story, there isn't much of a story development as such unless you have something in your life that makes you pick your brain, torture yourself with, scratch your old wounds...

Tobe says

With this book I am now officially a fan. A total about-change from *The Secret Magdalene* and *Flow Down Like Silver: Hypatia of Alexandria*, so much so, I am stunned. *Houdini Heart* is a deep swallow of slow acting poison. Wow.

Roamer says

I think this is a horror masterpiece. That about sums it up.

Bruce says

This is an intense novel of mainly psychological horror (no zombies, werewolves, vampires). At the same time, it is a tribute to a good deal of horror fiction and film that has preceded it. While telling its own story, it echoes precursors from Lovecraft to Shirley Jackson to Hitchcock to Stephen King, with more too numerous to list along the way. Although the narrator/protagonist is living in a huge five-story rooming house, once a grand hotel, the novel creates a sense of claustrophobic terror that keeps growing throughout the read. A compelling descent into madness and hallucination with some fine writing along the way.

Mario Angeles says

Where did this come from? Just when you think you know a writer, they come from out of nowhere with a completely different book. I was electrified as I read it. We are completely inside this woman, with her every step of her way. We don't know what the world outside her head is really like, if her perceptions are accurate or deluded. All we can do is walk in her shoes, think her unusual thoughts, see what she sees or thinks she sees. This is NOT your usual horror. It's magically real with real horror along the way. It's also psychological, deeply understanding of what can happen to a mind when it's stretched to its breaking point. And this is a creative mind, a writer's mind, used to making things up. It's what she does for a living. So is she writing a story? Or living one? I love still asking these questions. No putting the book aside when you're done and forgetting about it. Once you've read it, you're stuck with it. Love that. More stars! (If I loved this, I

wonder what her first book, China Blues, is like? Off to read that one.)

Keith Murray says

I've started this so-called review five times now. A review is talking about the book, what's it about, how does it read, is it like this book or that book, is it a success or a failure? Did I enjoy it? I'm not good at all that. It's why I don't write about the books I read, the ones I don't like, or even the ones I love. But I wanted to say something about this particular book. A lot of people love it. A couple don't like it at all. Now that I've read it myself, I can see why it would be seen so differently by different people. It's different. It doesn't fit easily into a neat slot called horror or fantasy or a thriller or a mystery even though there's something of all those about it. It's written in the first person. Some people don't like first person books. They're hard to do. If they don't work, they really don't work. The person speaking isn't named. We know she's a writer, we know she's running from something terrible, we know she's come to the end of the line. She tells us. She's honest. She doesn't hide and she doesn't brag and she doesn't pull her punches. And she slowly, over time, tells us what that terrible thing is. We watch her react to it. She's not mad. She's rational. It's rational to fall down a deep dark hole after all she's been through. Who wouldn't?

The woman is fascinating. I wanted to know all about her. Reading the book I felt I'd wasn't really reading but instead I was listening to her talk to me. She's so real. She scared me. She made me feel bad for her. I understood her horror. I was right there with her, right to the end.

For those who really don't care for the book, there are many more who do. I think this is a great book. I won't be forgetting it.

Earnsteddieddie says

Houdini Heart is the "Mulholland Drive" of books. Like Lynch's movie, it's this, it's that. It's not this, it's not that. People can discuss it, argue over it, think about it, read it again and again, but camps get created. Some might think it's a dream. Some a descent into madness. Some think she's trapped in a haunted house. Or hotel. Or town. For some, the creative process is set out in this woman's terrible tragic story. Perhaps it's about the destruction of the self to make art. Others have no patience unless they're reading a simple tale told in a straightforward manner. They're uncomfortable not being sure. Others want things spelled out. They don't like being confused. They want a pat and expected ending. They want a book written like their ABCs on lined paper. But some people, like me, love finding themselves in a Chinese Box, patting walls to find doors, opening doors to find walls behind them, climbing stairs that are never the same from one moment to the next. Like Mulholland Drive, our anti-heroine is asleep. Does she really wake up when she says she does? Or does the dream go on and on? Did she do what she says she did? Did she die doing it? Does she live forever by leaving the reality we believe in to enter one she believes in? Her own work?

But if you really pay attention, there's an inexorable logic to all of it. There are no loose ends. This is one well knitted book.

There's so much to say about this book. So many ideas that crawl under the skin like ants.

I am in love with this book. What a movie it would make. If I were an actress, I'd kill for the role. (Another idea: did she kill for her role?)

George Hastings says

Couldn't resist reading an entirely different book by someone who has filled her work with such intense meaning and historical accuracy. What a surprise. Longfellow seems to be able to write anything. This one is nothing like *The Secret Magdalene* or *Flow Down Like Silver: Hypatia of Alexandria*. It sneaky and sly and up-to-date and strange and pure literature even though it goes down like oil. It's about a writer, a second-rate writer, whose life has come to such a pass (partly through her own doing) that she's on the run. Which brings her back to the only town in her ambitious life that meant anything to her. A small town in Vermont in which stands a old hotel she remembers as magical. River House has come down in the world, just as she has, and together they weave themselves into a fantastical knot of other people's talent, first rate talent, or first rate ghosts. I loved it. I think it's right up there with the very best psychological horror.

Pamela Hornsby says

Horror is not my thing at all, and although this is horror, it's also supernatural horror and I love the supernatural. Something about its first few sentences grabbed me (I've already loved Longfellow's other books, so different!) and I raced through it just a little slower than my heart. The insight into the writer's mind, the stories of real writers, all those deaths, the hotel, the haunted little town, the real world crisis, all went up to make it a page turner until the last page. I didn't want it to stop. I wanted to stay in River House forever. Maybe. What am I saying? Yikes.

Catscradle says

I more than enjoy Longfellow's historical novels, but this one really surprised me. I wound up not knowing my own knees from my elbows. I had no idea what to expect and that's what I got. A story told in first person as if the reader were that person, and you go along, gradually learning why you're in Vermont and why you're in River House and what you've done. But you're never prepared for what you're going to do next. You think you could never do these things, that you're not that kind of person, but you're wrong. You don't think much of your work (you're a writer) but you think way too much of the work of others even as you hate their lives. And you hate your life. But you cling to it even as it becomes a funhouse of mad mirrors. I once saw a movie called *Angel Heart* and as soon as I finished it, I started it all over again just to see how it was made. I watched it again to marvel at the symbols and signals placed in every frame telling the story visually. I intend reading this a few times more for exactly the same reason.

Isaweloise says

Holy beeswax. I've never come across a writer who can change her or his entire style and do it with such panache. This is one creepy book and it's so tricky. You go in feeling sane and come out not so sure what sanity really means anymore. This is the story of what one of the book's real-life characters calls "an ordinary person forced into an extraordinary situation." I was already a fan of Longfellow's. Can I be a devotee?

Juniorbirdman says

Oh the writing. I reveled in it. I became the woman, absorbed into her world as the protected" woman in The Yellow Wall-Paper became part of the walls of her cage/room. Jumping from true-sounding tales of horrid Hollywood to a haunted hotel in Vermont, always observing, always with something witty and acerbic to say. But true things, real things. So steeped in the creations of others she can't tell her own world from theirs. So steeped in guilt and sorrow, she is ready to die. If she's not already dead. She is dead, although maybe her death has only reached her heart. I could go on and on, yakking about creative writing classes put to shame by this one book, about the natural easy truthful voice descending a staircase to hell. Or ascending a staircase to her own world, one she alone created, where she can live forever hidden from our world of consequences.

Lee Thompson says

4.5 stars. Loved the symbolism, metaphors, vivid imagery and Ki has a very easy-to-read style. The sub-text in certain passages rattled me. And I enjoyed the mystery of it all--I think too many writers spell things out too soon or too easily and this story doesn't. Definitely quiet horror, which I find much more chilling than the over-the-top, in-your-face variety. Don't want to give away any spoilers, which would be easy to do since everything is connected. I suggest you just go purchase it.

Opensesame says

Spellbinding. Mesmerizing. A work of unique brilliance. And so easy to read. So easy, it's like falling down Alice's Rabbit Hole. Whoops! And you're gone. But where are you when you get to the bottom? Houdini Heart. Houdini Heart. What a title when you know what the book is about. It's about an escape artist. A woman who escapes from feeling, and perhaps, even from life. I was trapped from the first few paragraphs. Highly recommended.

Byron 'Giggy' Paul says

Longfellow pays homage to and takes influence from Lovecraft, Shirley Jackson, Steven King, Hitchcock, Houdini, and the Wendigo legend, but creates a distinctly new and fresh modern psychological terror. The novel takes it shots at Hollywood and reveals the trials and tribulations of writers, and the horror that they suffer unto their own minds.

I also found many similarities to the popular and polarizing work of Danielewski's House of Leaves , although I'd guess unintentional. Those liking House of Leaves I feel are likely to love this, but this work also succeeds in every area House of Leaves drew complaints. In the end, you don't need Danielewski's if you can write like this.

side note: while this is not of the young-adult genre, it does seem to be a good fit for young teens wishing to read some good horror that doesn't include vampires that sparkle.

Erica says

I can't help but let the book speak for itself:

"Horror stories make some kind of sense. There's a monster of some sort. An infinite variety of monsters. In horror stories you either get eaten by the monster or you have to defeat the monster. Ghost stories have their own kind of sense. Something truly haunts a place. Or it haunts a person. A demon, the newly dead, a force, usually ill intended. But this story makes no sense at all."

It's very atmospheric, it goes as deep as you want it to, it can be interpreted in as many - or as few - ways as you wish.

The only reason I'm giving it 4 stars, not 5, is that at times it can get almost *too* uncaring about making sense. Not that it becomes garbled, and it never becomes too weird, but some of the things that happen are little too extreme, too hard to explain away as the main character losing her mind. It's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, but not as subtle as that story, which kind of makes it a little less effective. BUT, that's only my interpretation of it, because I *want* that interpretation, because I like it best.

I could put a "but maybe not" after every sentence in that last paragraph and it would still be true. It's a remarkable book, I know I'll be thinking about it for quite a while.

Darlene says

I've just put this book down and feel compelled to say something about it. I've been so long in the mind and world of the heroine (who has no name which took me a long time to notice), I feel like I'm still there. I'm seeing my own world as she saw hers. Creepy. This is one of those books that once you begin, and have to put it down for any reason, it calls to you: read me, read me, come back and read me. So you do even if reading it gets a little weirder by the page. It starts out so easily, so sadly, so normally. A woman at the end of the line, trying to come home. She's a writer still trying to write even though her life is in ruins all around her. But she believes she has one last book and so she gets a room in a hotel she loved as a child, and from there...well, from there you just follow her down and down and down or perhaps up and up and up. An extraordinary book, and perfectly written.

Stan Moody says

Now here's a book. Controlled, playful, strange, knowing, written by a skilled, impeccable hand. It contains a heroine to die for, or with. I was with whoever she was from her first mutterings. There's a book within this book. It pretends to be bits and pieces of our anti-heroines best novel, but when you take it out, and lay it down all by itself, it's a short story. And here is the key or the "heart" of thing, I think. The Windigo's Daughter eats people like any self-respecting windigo would. And she's managed to worm her way into "our" world of movie stars and writers and nice little Vermont towns. She doesn't want to go back to the fantastical world she's escaped. She's hungry and there's food here. I see this as the perfect (pardon me) metaphor for the artist. And our heroine in the outer book, the one wrapped around the short story, is most definitely an artist. Everything she does is done with the dedication of the born artist. In other words, she'd eat her young

to write one great book. I loved this thing. I shall read it again and again until I get it. I almost get it. But like a firefly, it remains just out of the reach. What a trip.

Katherine Preston says

Just this minute put this book down on the table. I feel wobbly. I can hear the woman talking talking talking even now, commenting on her own interesting slide into insanity or into the black hole that is River House or into true sanity which is creative. I could have listened to her talk for much much longer. She made me cry and she horrified me and I understood her and I didn't understand her and what a fascinating woman. I think she has to be the best anti-hero I've ever found. And I don't know her name even now. But I know Kate. Her Kate. Broke my heart. Just as it broke the woman who was called Houdini Heart. LOVED IT. WANT MORE.
