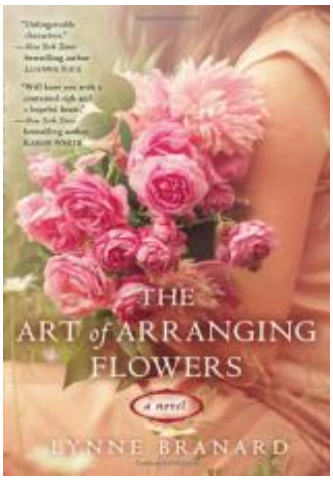
The Art of Arranging Flowers

by Lynne Branard



About the Book

Ruby Jewell knows flowers. In her 20 years as a florist she has stood behind the counter at the Flower Shoppe with her faithful dog, Clementine, resting at her feet. A customer can walk in, and with just a glance or a few words, Ruby can throw together the perfect arrangement for any occasion.

Whether intended to rekindle a romance, mark a celebration, offer sympathy or heal a broken heart, her expressive floral designs mark the moments and milestones in the lives of her neighbors. It?s as though she knows just what they want to say, just what they need.

Yet Ruby?s own heart?s desires have gone ignored since the death of her beloved sister. It will take an invitation from a man who?s flown to the moon, the arrival of a unique little boy and concern from a charming veterinarian to reawaken her wounded spirit. Any life can be derailed, but the healing power of community can put it right again.

Discussion Guide

1. Regarding missing a flower delivery, Lucy says, ?that?s just a mistake that cannot be forgiven.? Why do flowers symbolize something so paramount that missing a delivery would be a disaster? What crucial roles do flowers play in relationships --- both romantic and nonromantic --- between people?

2. Ruby makes it clear that she has never been in a serious romantic relationship, though we hear undeniably erotic descriptions of plants as ?stems of short, curved, tender blades,? and ?white with little narrow lips of purple.? Do you think Ruby expresses her sensuality through her trade? Do you think her passion for flowers is a stand-in for other longings?

3. Nora and Jimmy are both alcoholics, and their relationship is rooted in the recovery process. How do Ruby and Dan

forge a similar (platonic) bond, and what fuels that bond?

4. Jimmy tells Ruby that she has a reputation for ?fixing hearts.? And much later, Nora echoes that the whole town has expressed that sentiment. In ?fixing? others? hearts, how might Ruby have neglected her own? Can empathy over-extend into self-neglect?

5. Dan says that ?When I was in space and saw the stars?I felt as if I were seeing something of myself?I felt as if I were somehow connected to these great beings.? Have you ever felt that kind of ineffable connection that Dan describes? Was it with a person, or a place, or a thing --- like Dan?s stars?

6. Will says, ?Sometimes I worry that everybody I love will die.? Many of the characters are either at death?s door or have suffered the tragic loss of a loved one. How do they find ways not to live in the constant fear that Will expresses?

7. What is the symbolic significance of Clementine?s encounter with the porcupine and Ruby?s interference --- and subsequent injury? How is that a watershed moment in Ruby?s life?

8. Ruby?s and Will?s lives are both wrought with tragedy. In the prologue, Ruby quotes Hemingway?s famous assertion that we become ?strong in the broken places.? How is this both true and false? How do Will and Ruby reflect the truth in this, and where to they find their strength, or solace?

9. The title points to how serious and sacred a flower arrangement can be. Do you think Ruby?s flower arrangements function as characters in the novels? If so, at what crucial moments do they bring other characters together, and in what significant events do they play a part?

10. Barring the prologue and epilogue, the story begins and ends on Stan and Viola Marcus?s anniversary. Ruby always has the same exchange with Stan: She remembers his anniversary, and he leaves her shop stating that he is ?the lucky one.? Why did the author choose to bookend the novel in this way? How is Stan?s relationship with his wife emblematic of what marriage means?

11. Were you surprised that Ruby changed her mind and decided to adopt Will? Did you think it was a wise or foolish choice? How might the story have been vastly different if Jenny and Justin adopted Will?

12. Why do you think the author chose to include an epilogue on the day of Ruby?s death? What role does death play in the book that makes it a fitting ending?

13. During the conversation with Dan about whether or not Ruby will adopt Will, Dan explains the mechanics of how flowers bloom. ?It turns out that the instabilities that shape roots and blossoms often come about when certain cells become longer than others. The rapid growth causes strain, which bends the soft tissues?? What is he really telling Ruby? How does the ?biology of blooming? manifest itself in her life?

14. Ruby is near paralyzed by her sister Daisy?s death, until she finds herself ?pulled out of bed? at the sight of the flora just outside the window. How does the art of arranging flowers take the place of Daisy in Ruby?s life? How might Ruby?s life have been different if her sister had not died?

15. The Greeks had four words for love: *eros*, *agape*, *philia* and *storge* (in short: romantic love, spiritual love, friendship and familial love). How do we see these different types of love manifested in Creekside?

Author Bio

Lynne Branard is a pseudonym for *New York Times* bestselling author Lynne Hinton. She has written more than a dozen books, including FRIENDSHIP CAKE, PIE TOWN and WELCOME BACK TO PIE TOWN.

Critical Praise

?I devoured this book."

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