



Heart of Palm

Laura Lee Smith

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“Intelligence, heart, wit . . . Laura Lee Smith has all the tools and *Heart of Palm* is a very impressive first novel.”—Richard Russo, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Empire Falls*

Utina, Florida, is a small, down-at-heels southern town. Once enlivened by the trade in Palm Sunday palms and moonshine, Utina hasn't seen economic growth in decades, and no family is more emblematic of the local reality than the Bravos. Deserted by the patriarch years ago, the Bravos are held together in equal measure by love, unspoken blame, and tenuously brokered truces.

The story opens on a sweltering July day, as Frank Bravo, dutiful middle son, is awakened by a distress call. Frank dreams of escaping to cool mountain rivers, but he's only made it ten minutes from the family restaurant he manages every day and the decrepit, Spanish-moss-draped house he was raised in, and where his strong-willed mother and spitfire sister—both towering redheads, equally matched in stubbornness—are fighting another battle royale. Little do any of them know that Utina is about to meet the tide of development that has already engulfed the rest of Northeast Florida. When opportunity knocks, tempers ignite, secrets are unearthed, and each of the Bravos is forced to confront the tragedies of their shared past.

Reminiscent of Kaye Gibbons, Lee Smith, Anne Tyler, and Fannie Flagg, *Heart of Palm* introduces Laura Lee Smith as a captivating new voice in American fiction.

"Like a sandspur, *Heart of Palm* sticks with you, drawing blood."--Rita Mae Brown, author of *The Sand Castle*

“Laura Lee Smith masterfully creates a deep, compassionate, and often heartbreakingly funny portrait of a wild, complex Southern family on the brink of massive change . . . Smith is a brilliant writer, and *Heart of Palm* brims with lush vitality, loss, and desire.”—Julianna Baggott, author of *Pure* and *The Prince of Fenway Park*

“[An] incandescent debut novel . . . I can't get the astonishing and benighted Bravos out of my head. And I don't want to. What an extravagantly and engagingly flawed family this is! Smith is an enchanter casting her spell with lyrical prose, evocative details, and spellbinding characters. She explores familial chaos, reckless behavior, and hopeless love with grace, intelligence, and tenderness. She gives me what I long for in fiction: compassion and provocation. What talent, what nerve, what a wondrous and spellbinding story. Trust me, these Bravos will haunt your dreams.”—John Dufresne, author of *Requiem, Mass.* and *Louisiana Power and Light*

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Ramiro Alvarez:

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