

MAGNOLIA SKY

By Susan Crandall

Warner Forever, 2004

Reviewed by :: Lisa Bradley

The lush and sultry South is always the perfect setting for a novel with a Gothic feel. Here the Gothic element manifests in the character of Luke Boudreau, a Special Forces officer whose friend and fellow Ranger, Calvin Abbott, died saving his life. Luke's psychic wounds run even deeper than the scars on his body, scars which have left him unable to continue his duties in the military. Feeling lost and wracked with guilt, he travels to the small town of Grover, Mississippi to see Calvin's mother at her home, Magnolia Mile. There, he's met with a surprise: the lovely wife Calvin somehow failed to mention.

Analise Abbott has a terrible secret, one which haunts her every day. Having married into the Abbott family, she has come to adore her mother-in-law, Olivia, and Olivia's teenage son, Cole. And for their sakes, she will never tell anyone what a negligent husband Calvin was, or how much she resented him for it. Now that he's gone, it's even more important she never tell, or she risks losing the only true family she's ever known.

When Luke Boudreau arrives, the sparks run hot, something for which both Luke and Analise feel terribly guilty. As circumstances force Luke to stay in Magnolia Mile, they both quickly realize there's more than sparks between them. But can either of them let go of their guilt over Calvin's death and allow themselves to love one another?

Susan Crandall has managed to create characters of great depth, and a story of great emotion. The conflicts of the main characters are so deeply intertwined, it seems impossible that they will ever overcome them and come together. The author touches on some very serious issues, and her characters approach them in such a way that one suspects the author has been through some of these tragedies herself. This makes for an engrossing, emotional read, and I found it difficult to put the book down.

This is not a relentlessly tragic story, however; the heavy subject matter is interspersed with lighter, warmer moments. A poignant and lovely story with many layers, *Magnolia Sky* is one of those books I stayed up far into the night to finish, and in the end, I found it hard to say good-bye.

4 ½ kisses