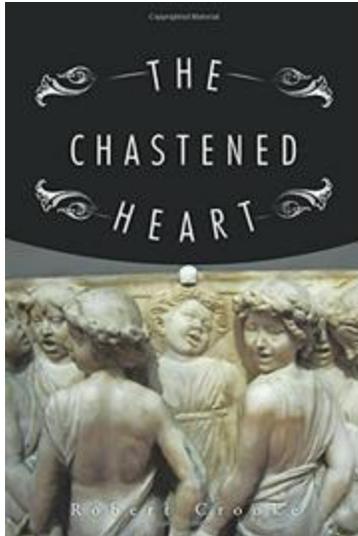


KIRKUS REVIEWS



THE CHASTENED HEART

by Robert Crooke

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A novel of hope, fiction, love and duty, set in a time of great uncertainty.

In 2007, Alice Winslow, a professor at a small liberal arts university, has done what few before her have been able to do: She's published a deeply moving piece of literary fiction that's also a *New York Times* best-seller. What should be a grand achievement for Alice, however, is quickly compromised when an accidental run-in with a political activist at a television studio thrusts Alice, quite literally, into the spotlight. She's already in hot water with some people in her department, so this new association threatens to shatter the fragile life she's built. Things aren't much easier for Alice's husband, Tom, a newspaperman who's facing not only devastating cuts following a corporate buyout, but also the legacy of a decision he made long ago. Her son, Will, likewise struggles in a relationship. In fact, the whole social fabric of the town seems to be wearing thin, creating an atmosphere ready for a crisis. Crooke expertly weaves together the various plot strands, drawing on the tragedy of the 9/11 attacks and the economic collapse of 2008 to tell a richly detailed, poignantly observed story. At one point, for example, Alice reflects on the message of a novel that a colleague shared with her: "[L]ife is a tenuous balance of love and fate...hope is a fiction made plausible by our choices." It's an

observation that sums up the overall tone of the novel: Crooke explores what it means to love but also what it means to endure—what life throws our way, as well as the choices we make. As Alice’s story unfolds in the public eye, readers witness one person’s struggle for clarity, compassion and the truth, but they also see the machinations of a society wrestling to come to terms with a new, unfamiliar world. It’s a struggle that transcends the page and has implications for contemporary society.

A human story about truth, beauty and the limitations of love.