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Ordinary Women: Extraordinary Heroines

Acclaimed authors **Teri Coyne ("The Last Bridge")** and **Masha Hamilton ("31 Hours")** talk about trends in female characters and the undeniable rise of The Heroine Mystique at **KGB Bar Jan. 28, 2010.**

New York, 31 December 2009: Ordinary women leading extraordinary lives will be the focus at literary institution KGB Bar (85 E. 4th Street, NYC) Thursday, January 28 at 7 p.m. with authors Teri Coyne and Masha Hamilton reading from their most recent works, "The Last Bridge," and "31 Hours." An exploration of a new paradigm for the heroine, the event will expose a roster of fresh female characters who are often deeply flawed but willful protagonists, who use their intelligence and wit (and sometimes socially-inappropriate survival skills) to achieve self-actualization.

The authors will be joined by a surprise roster of guest readers who will share journal entries from The Afghan Women's Writing Project, begun in 2009 by Masha Hamilton to foster creative and intellectual exchange between Afghan women writers and American authors and teachers.

Coyne and Hamilton are part of a growing legion of writers creating a modern identity for the heroine that's transformed from the stereotypical supporting player or romance-driven damsel to a more modest, often damaged female that is imperfect and unapologetic. Each author has written characters or known women who are in remarkable circumstance: women on death row; Afghan women fighting to have their voices heard; alcoholics struggling to regain their life; journalists seeking understanding; mothers, sisters, wives; all united in their fervent desire to find a place where they truly belong. Often they are liberating themselves from the past, their families or a culture that dismisses them. These are ordinary women leading extraordinary lives; they defy convention and show courage under fire even if it looks like they are fumbling to the finish line. Ultimately the new heroine understands the journey is her own.

And the media has noticed. In a review of Ms. Coyne's book in the Los Angeles Times, crime and mystery blogger Sarah Weinman said of the trend in female characters: "They don't let the baggage of brutal childhoods and emotional damage keep them from their quests, and, as Chicago Tribune cultural critic Julia Keller wrote in a column titled, "Girls Gone Wild": 'They're not meek. They're not mild. They do as they please and they don't play well with others. They're misfits with moxie.' And they don't have to apologize for their behavior -- not much, anyway."

So why are these new heroines showing up now? Coyne and Hamilton think this is a topic worth exploring. In an age of global unrest and more access to the once hidden stories of women around the world, are today's authors channeling collective angst? Could it be a resurrection of "The Feminine Mystique," with a twist? Or could it simply be, in an age of failing financial structures and the boys who brought them down, that women are discovering that the only people able to save them are themselves?

"I have long believed the most radical thing a woman can do is to speak honestly about her life, accept her flaws and abandon a need to be liked or agreeable," Coyne says. "I gravitate toward stories that reflect this reality back to me. Masha is a writer I connect with for that reason. My passion is to help all women see themselves as extraordinary heroines of their own story."

The evening promises to be filled with great stories, insights and engaging discussions.

Teri Coyne's novel, "The Last Bridge," debuted in July 2009, and was called, "...a compelling debut..." (Publishers Weekly) and a "...psychological tour de force..." (Booklist). Writing since she received her first typewriter on her 10th birthday, she studied poetry with Philip Shultz, novel writing at Iowa Summer Writers Workshop, memoir with Frank McCourt and fiction with Masha Hamilton. A former stand-up comedienne, she also explored filmmaking, playwriting, acting, producing and directing. Teri lives in New York. (www.tericoyne.com)

Masha Hamilton is a former Associated Press and Los Angeles Times foreign correspondent and the author of four acclaimed novels, most recently "31 Hours" (2009), named by The Washington Post as one of the best thrillers/mysteries of 2009, exclaiming in their review, "[She's] made it very hard to tear your gaze away." Hamilton is also the founder of two world literacy programs: the Camel Book Drive, begun in 2007 to supply a camel-borne library in northeastern Kenya, and the Afghan Women's Writing Project, begun in 2009 to foster creative and intellectual exchange between Afghan women writers and American women authors and teachers. Her previous novels include "Staircase of a Thousand Steps" (2001); "The Distance Between Us" (2004) and "The Camel Bookmobile" (2007). (www.mashahamilton.com)

KGB Bar has become the premiere venue for all ranges of the literary world, and has been named best literary venue by New York Magazine, the Village Voice and everyone else who bestows these awards of recognition. The bar and its literary figures have been featured in several New York Times articles as well as featured in an eight-page New York Times Magazine spread. Since 1993, writers hooked up in the publishing world read here with pleasure and without pay to an adoring public over drinks almost every Sunday evening (fiction), Monday evening (poetry), and most Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

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