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General

A Departure from the Script
Rochelle Hollander Schwab
Orlando Place Press
978-0-9643650-1-8
(March 31, 2002)

“Maybe you’ve already guessed,” Jenny says anxiously to her mother in this novel. “But I’ve come to realize I’ll never have any kind of romantic feelings for a man.” With that, a whole family reels and tries to adjust, lurching at first and poorly at times, searching for peace with, and some form of acceptance of, a gay child.

Told from the point of view of the mother, Sheila Katz, the novel is completely unflinching in presenting the feelings of a confused, disappointed parent who is trying to readjust a worldview that once seemed so solid. The author does not gloss over Sheila’s reactions to make her seem more accepting or emotionally healthy. Instead, the book is rife with frustration about her husband’s denial, her hope that Jenny might be going through a phase, and her anger about having her efforts at tolerance go unnoticed. All of this makes Sheila a vibrant, real character whose journey through this emotional terrain is ultimately a satisfying, rich voyage.

Schwab's writing is much like her main character: warm, earthy, resolute. She doesn't employ long passages of poetic description, but rather concentrates mainly on dialogue and simple storytelling, and it works beautifully. Her splendid ear for dialogue provides conversation that sounds overheard, not written. During a heated talk with Jenny about her lifestyle, Sheila finally snaps, "You just meant that everything your father says is fine with you, no matter how bigoted, but when I do my best to be accepting and supportive about your orientation it gets thrown back in my face!" When Jenny responds that she meant to say something differently, Sheila shouts, "Oh, just shut up! I don't want to hear what you meant!" It's a notable moment, since the character has rarely allowed her anger to be seen until that point, and it's typical of Schwab's excellent pacing that the usually composed Sheila loses it so fiercely, and can then go on from there. Also sure to delight readers is the author's knack for humor, which balances the novel nicely, and keeps the story zipping along.

Although this novel will interest parents of gay children, and those readying themselves to come out to their parents, the larger issue of how to accept the decisions of one's children should broaden its appeal.