Clarion Review

General

An Ignoble End
Jacqueline James
AuthorHouse
978-1-4490-1242-7
Three Stars (out of Five)

Jacqueline James's novel, *An Ignoble End*, focuses on a biology teacher, the relationship she has with her husband, and the fight she puts up against cancer. Straightaway, the reader is thrown into the heart of the storm. Just as James' protaganist fends off breast cancer and discovers a passion for politics, an inoperable tumor appears in her spine. Life has just started to look up for her when a seemingly immovable road block appears. She refuses to retire from parliament, even as her illness grows worse. And when the couple decides to keep the cancer private, the novel becomes a study of grief and a suspense-filled thriller.

Hiding cancer is far more complicated than one might think. This character fights not just to keep her office, but to keep her dignity. The novel's unique plot is certainly one of its strengths, as suspense novels most often involve spies, war, intelligence organizations, and the like. In this case, the reader comes to care for the protagonist because of skillfully rendered scenes, like when she has to go through her mother's belongings.

The links between cancer, grief, and politics are made in subtle ways, such as when James names one chapter, "Good Practice." Though simple, the chapter could be referring to medical practice, or the practice of politics. Likewise, the chapter, "Could This Be a Good Day?" might allude to the protagonist's health, her hidden condition, or politics. The multiple meanings add layers of metaphor.

The closing of the novel moves at light speed. Oddly, James uses the final page of the novel to tie up all loose ends, as well as having the protagonist make a final decision about her political career. This rushed closing may satisfy greedy readers, but it seems too abrasive and rushed for a novel. After all, the previous sections have dealt with cancer, the couple's grief, and politics. Similarly, the layout of the novel is sometimes distracting: dialogue, plot summaries, and multiple scenes are often lumped into the same paragraphs or sections. If such sections were

divided, the content would be much easier to read, and that much more moving.

James is at her best when she writes about the small joys this couple experiences: having a “good day,” the sunlight coming into a room, and the quiet moments they spend together. *An Ignoble End* is a smart meditation on grief, love, and living a life until the very last breath. Perhaps death is not beautiful, but the protagonist at the heart of this novel, props herself up despite all.

Lisa Bowers