ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

At the Rainbow's End
Robert Dean Frelow
978-1-4259-5729-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

It's inevitable that a Civil War premise conjures Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With The Wind* and in its scope and length Frelow's novel is certainly of the same vein. A longtime educator Frelow's second book about the period not only tells a story but also re-imagines situations surrounding historical detail.

Set after the war in Arlington Virginia the story is fixed in Mary and Jefferson Bright's attempt to recapture their lost lifestyle including regaining the service of former slaves. They have an awkward though strangely loving relationship even as they appear more necessary partners than lovers. "She had become the master of his wellbeing" the narrator informs us while "he had become the agent of her hopes and dreams."

Rather than embodying the South Mary simply wants life to look like the South. Though her ambition is admirable Frelow does her a disservice by constructing uncontrollable passion as the impetus for her decisions. "It was always a struggle" for Mary "knowing what to do about the temptations the unruly passions." Improbably nearly any man is the object whether Billy a young former slave brought back into the home or Jefferson's untrustworthy business associate.

Jefferson a lawyer likewise wants a return to the predictable Old South but primarily to keep Mary happy. He claims incredible passion for her but calls her Mother even though their sons are grown and nearly estranged. Further his emotions swing from fondness to sexual arousal to suspicion of her and Barksdale a deceitful political candidate and Grand Titan in the Klan. It's unclear what engenders his enduring faith in their relationship.

Likewise his partnership with Barksdale on an ill-fated railroad scheme reveals additional inconsistency this time in his integrity making him a difficult character with which to connect. He sees the truth but quickly denies it in all situations and continually "resist[s] logic" even about cross burnings: "It didn't seem right to use the Christian cross that way. But there was a voice to the contrary: The Klan was the only hope for the South. He had to have his life back he and his Mary."

The story's twists are at times questionable and everything is rife with innuendo and

suspicion yet this is partly how Frelow moves the story forward even as it meanders fittingly like molasses. The prose is competent although spelling errors and confusing dialogue formatting speak to the need for more careful editing and were the characters given more natural dialogue and convincing actions that revealed authentic emotion the story would have gained more vitality.

Despite easily solved conflicts Frelow successfully builds on illusions of resolution to produce a suspenseful story complete with murder trial which assists the characters in finally moving into a more hopeful future. His crafting of a lucid setting and an atmosphere peopled by a diverse cast of characters offers a promising addition to literature about a time that continues to captivate Americans' imaginations.