ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

Battle of Wills
Sue Curran
CreateSpace
978-1-4536-7085-9
Four Stars (out of Five)

In her second novel, Alabama-born-and-bred Sue Curran offers up a fast-paced compelling story with Southern flair. The title is a play on words: the strong-willed, single-mother protagonist, Sue Backman, battles against her intransigent father, secretive townsfolk, and stonewalling lawmen as she tries to discover the whereabouts of her best friend. Simultaneously, Sue is looking for an ancestor's last testament, a will which would prevent some valuable family parkland from being developed. In her vivid descriptions of setting and characters, the author transports readers back to a swampy area of the religious rural South. Readers will feel the spookiness of the bottom-lands, sweat in the summer heat, and get to know the major players as if they were old friends.

Curran masterfully depicts intergenerational family relationships as Sue is torn between her independent streak and giving her overbearing father the deference he expects. There is also a nuanced dynamic between Sue and her seven-year-old, John Earl; the little boy struggles to be a rock for his mother while she tries to shield him from harm. This poignant mother-son relationship accurately captures the intricacies of the parent-child bond. Refreshingly, too, Curran explores rapport between siblings, cousins, and best friends, all while noting blood ties and shared memory. Sue's reconciliation with her estranged brother and cousin are deftly done. *Battle of Wills* moves at breakneck pace, with unexpected twists piling atop one another, keeping readers in suspense. Amidst all the high drama, Curran manages to develop a believable and touching romance for Sue. Each character has distinct personality traits.

Unfortunately, the plotline involving the ancestor's will is not well integrated into the far more interesting kidnapping thread until the very end. The story is also marked by missing quotation marks around conversations and other absent punctuation. At one point, Sue is described as thirty-four years old; at another juncture she is thirty-seven. However, these distractions do not prevent *Battle of Wills* from being an intriguing, pulse-pounding thriller.

Jill Allen