Clarion Review

General

Carrington Elsewhere
Justine Fernandez
iUniverse
978-1-4401-2313-9
Three Stars (out of Five)

Carrington Coyle a.k.a. Cinderella cleans house cooks the meals and takes abuse from her evil alcoholic mother and spoiled half-sister. Although it is not billed as a Cinderella story this is a modern version of the old fairy tale that includes realistic details such as illegitimate children poverty drug and alcohol addiction child abuse and neglect. Unfortunately the novel fails to elevate itself above stereotypical characters and predictable outcomes.

Fourteen-year-old Carrington's life takes a turn for the better when her mother spies the obituary for Carrington's druggie alcoholic and absent father. While her mother plots to extort money from Carrington's unsuspecting paternal grandmother Carrington runs off to find the woman. They immediately form an unshakeable too-good-to-be-true relationship. Skipping past most of the legal wrangling Grandma becomes Carrington's guardian. Grandma a mature well-grounded woman lives among members of her wealthy extended family who suffer from a variety of addictions and hackneyed attitudes associated with keeping up appearances. Carrington's emergence brings festering family grievances to a head and old wounds break open. Carmen Grandma's best friend lawyer and "fairy godmother" figure provides a refreshing departure from the traditional stereotypes bringing delightful dialogue and attitude: "Obscene nothin'. Honey you should have seen some of the postcards I almost sent you! Anyway what I didn't tell you about that cruise was that it was Stanley's first—and not his last mind you—attempt to get me to swing; and I don't mean the kind that involves Glenn Miller tunes."

This is Justine Fernandez's second novel. She provides believable details by drawing on her interest in alcoholic parents and family dynamics. The novel progresses in a well-organized manner with individual chapters devoted to separate characters and their stories. Sadly it suffers from uneven writing. At its best it provides a compelling read: "The pounding din of the bar—the voices the music—everything rushed together in Joan's head as she collapsed on the

grimy carpet….”

Plagued by abrupt point-of-view shifts and intrusion of authorial voice as well as lack of scene development the novel remains shallow never delving beyond the surface of the characters’ motivations. Conflicts fail to build any tension and several story threads remain unresolved. Even with these weaknesses the novel may appeal to readers who like a modern-day Cinderella tale with mild conflict development and clearly distinguishable good and bad guys.