ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Charlene's Dream
Emerson Collier
AuthorHouse
978-1-4670-4210-9
Two Stars (out of Five)

Like many people, Charlene Tomlinson yearns for a loving marriage and a fulfilling family life. Attaining these seemingly simple goals prove far more difficult than she imagined as she faces one tragedy after another, ranging from a loved one's death to the challenges of raising a difficult, self-destructive child. Charlene's attempts to hang onto her dream and find a way to make it real are at the heart of *Charlene's Dream*.

Charlene's story is fraught with devastating moments, beginning with the loss of her true love. From that moment forward the challenges keep coming: the most significant being her husband's progressive emotional withdrawal and her son's disruptive personality. Throughout the narrative, Charlene is portrayed as a victim, a characterization that is emphasized by consistently referring to her as "poor Charlene." Although readers are sure to empathize with much of Charlene's sad story, her lack of growth as a character suggests that they are less likely to be inspired by it.

The often extreme behavioral problems displayed by Charlene's son, Parker, are exhaustively explored, yet readers are apt to remain unconvinced that the child is the cause of every marital and family problem, as is implied. Emerson Collier writes, "Even at two and a half he knew how to work a crowd and get sympathy….Little Parker was a con man, or, in his case, a con kid. Even at this tender age he knew exactly what he was doing." The willingness of every member of Parker's family to believe him capable of behaving with a level of intent far beyond his developmental stage may pull reader sympathy from Charlene to little Parker.

The novel stumbles over a number of novice errors, including a scarcity of necessary commas and a continuous repetition of mundane details and scenes. The spelling of one character's name changes in the course of the story, and dialogue is often presented within a single paragraph. Collier includes some of her own commentary in the form of random life lessons, such as, "Sometimes there are no easy answers in the game called love," and "Nothing in life is free. Even dreams come with a price tag." Although some readers may appreciate the

comments, many will find them distracting and self-indulgent.

Regardless of these difficulties, Collier's story includes some interesting characters, and readers are certain to find some of the story appealing. That appeal may be undermined, however, when Charlene's story line is abruptly and inexplicably abandoned halfway through the book. Readers are suddenly introduced to a new character, Connie, whose life is explored with tedious detail for several chapters. By the time Charlene's story is resumed and a connection is made between her and Connie, many readers may have already closed the book in confused frustration.

Charlene's Dream shows promise, particularly in the successful presentation of an ongoing theme exploring how the actions of one person can have an impact on many other people. Collier is often effective with character descriptions, and the novel eventually brings everything together for a complete, if predictable, conclusion. *Charlene's Dream* could be reworked effectively with the assistance of an experienced content editor and further research into proper fiction writing technique.

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