Clarion Review

Romance

Choose Me
Laurina C. Osborne
CreateSpace
978-1-4793-6509-8
Two Stars (out of Five)

Justina is at a romantic crossroads. Laurina Osborne's second novel, *Choose Me*, follows the twenty-year journey leading up to the collision of circumstances that brings together the three men Justina has loved. She'll have to make a decision that reconciles her feelings for all three and hopefully leads her to the love she deserves.

Coming to terms with her relationships with Vaughn, Josh, and Andrew isn't an easy thing for Justina. There's Vaughn, whom Justina could never forget after their unexpected and short-lived love affair during a trip to St. Matthews right before her high school graduation. Josh was Justina's first love and high school sweetheart, but his hesitations about an interracial marriage drove Justina to break up with him in hopes of protecting herself.

Justina's relationship with Andrew is the longest and most complex. What started as a marriage of convenience between two virtual strangers becomes a full-fledged relationship. The pair has two children together, and though they divorce after Andrew's infidelity, they continue to date each other. Figuring out where they stand is complicated by familial pressures to remarry, a mutual friend who is in love with Andrew, and the couple's feelings of obligation toward one another.

Readers may find the modernity and realism in the plot refreshing. Justina isn't a fair maiden waiting for a prince to save her; she's characterized, instead, as a driven, career-oriented woman. She attempts to balance work, love, and family through a variety of difficulties. The numerous intimate interactions in the text are similarly those of a present-day, sexually liberated woman looking to fulfill her own needs as well as those of her partners.

Some readers may be particularly drawn in by the ethnically diverse characters and the touches of Caribbean culture and values that bring a unique feel to the novel. *Choose Me* is an addition to a small but growing number of multicultural romances. It may find an audience with

readers looking for heroines that look, physically, more like themselves.

As with any novel, there are elements that certain readers will value over others. Some may be perfectly happy with the degree of depth of the romantic relationships, while others may see them as shallow. Similarly, Justina and the other characters may not be as fully realized or developed as some readers could envision, while other readers, swept away in the action and emotion of the story, may not consider this an issue.

There are, however, certain overall characteristics of the book that affect the quality on a broader level. One recurring issue is the lack of syntactic variety. While this isn't the case for the entire story, certain passages become extremely tedious, and often even unnecessary.

The plot and pacing are also compromised. Perhaps as an attempt to round out Justina's character and have the narrative capture more of her life, there are a couple of subplots involving her career and her estranged father. Although they do help drive home the idea that a person's romantic life is never the only thing they have to worry about, these pieces are not integrated cohesively into Justina's journey. Instead, they feel like a distraction and slow down the story, which already gets bogged down at other points.

Choose Me has the potential to strike an emotional chord with the right reader.

Alicia Sondhi