Clarion Review

Historical

Corrigan's Pool
Dot Ryan
iUniverse
978-0-595-46740-2
Five Stars (out of Five)

Upon finishing Dot Ryan's debut novel, *Corrigans' Pool*, readers will feel thankful that this remarkable writing talent has burst on the scene and chosen to share such a gem. Ryan's storytelling ability and masterful use of setting, dialogue, and characterization add up to an exquisite piece of historical fiction.

The eldest of two daughters, Ella Corrigan rises to the challenge when a family tragedy results in an incapacitated mother and a father consumed by guilt. Despite the pressures of essentially running the family plantation on her own, she bears the burden of responsibility stoically, with kindness, efficiency, and little resentment for her lot in life.

Somewhat resigned to the possibility of never marrying, Ella is stunned by her reaction when she meets the dashing, if seemingly ill-suited, Gentry Garland. She repeatedly resists the attraction at first, resulting in moments both touching and amusing, until Gentry finally lays it all on the line: "One of two things is going to happen, Miss Ella Corrigan. Either we're going to walk away from each other here and now, or we're going to stop fooling ourselves and admit the god-awful truth."

From there, it doesn't take long for Ella to begin envisioning a different, more enriching future—at least until the Civil War lands on their doorstep and Gentry strangely disappears without a word. Devastated, Ella refocuses on doing the best for her family, making the fateful decision to marry neighboring plantation owner Victor Faircloth. Victor's increasingly contemptuous violence toward those who serve his household sickens Ella, and a gripping mystery begins to unfold involving his rapidly disappearing slaves and the beautiful pool on Ella's family property. As the Civil War rages on, Ella finds herself fighting a war of her own to save her home, her loved ones, and the innocent victims of her husband's brutality. Villains and heroes are exposed in their true light, loves are lost and found, and the strength of human spirit

ultimately prevails.

Corrigans' Pool manages to blend romance, mystery, humor, and tragedy with flawless precision. Ryan paints a picture of the old South with a colorful palette of respectful admiration and stark reality, drawing readers into the beauty of the land as well as the horror of the war that threatened to destroy it. Each character is vibrant in their individuality, and every scene is drawn with a rich detail that engages the reader and evokes emotion without becoming cumbersome. The romance is moving but subtle, the mystery is suspenseful, and the story flows smoothly toward a dramatic and satisfying conclusion.

Readers are sure to be enthralled with this exceptional novel, and they will be pleased to know that Ryan is currently penning the sequel. *Corrigans' Pool* is a superior achievement, and author Dot Ryan is undeniably a talent not to be missed. Highly recommended.