Clarion Review

General

Dark Lily
Nina Navarre
Xlibris
978-1-4771-0121-6
Four Stars (out of Five)

Dark Lily, the debut romance novel from Nina Navarre, combines ancient traditions, haunting islands, femme fatales, and the horror of history repeating itself. The story will be appreciated by romance lovers and mystery lovers alike.

Lily lives alone in an island mansion with no one to keep her company but her hunting hounds. The rest of the island's inhabitants fear and admire her. She is accused of killing men who had the misfortune of being beguiled by her. But the young woman suspected of torturing others is, in fact, a victim of sinister forces. Oliver, a leading man of the silver screen, is sent to Lily's island as punishment for his hard-partying ways. When Lily saves his life, he is inexorably drawn into her web. Navarre creates a believable story in which old decrees and traditions influence the modern lives of Lily and Oliver.

Telling the story in omniscient third-person narration allows Navarre to steep readers in the history of Lily's family and to alternate the story between the perspectives of Lily and Oliver. The switching back and forth effectively ramps up suspense. Readers feel for Lily as Navarre reveals her protagonist's demons bit by bit, and they fear for Oliver as he falls in love with Lily. Is Lily actually the man-eater the townsfolk suspect her of being? As the truth unfolds, the audience sees the couple's growing affection, as well as their confusion and terror, as they begin to realize they are puppets in something larger. Navarre does a masterful job of keeping the identity of the villain secret. She deftly illustrates how Lily grows to adore those who abuse her. By creating a complex relationship between Lily and the characters who mistreat her, Navarre underscores the intricate love-hate relationships victims sometimes have with their batterers.

The setting underscores the plot's mysterious yet menacing edge. Navarre breathes new life into the trope of isolating characters from society. Banishing Oliver to an island for bad

behavior seems an almost medieval punishment, rendered harsher by the island's wild forests and moaning winds. Lily's mansion possesses equal parts threat and allure. Although the story blends ancient and modern, past and present don't always gel cohesively. When the first chapters mention royalty, swords, and women held captive in chains, one expects to enter a fairytale realm, or at least the realm of historical fiction. The sudden introduction of automobiles is jarring. Readers may also find themselves momentarily lost because Navarre sometimes waits a bit too long to reveal whose viewpoint is being used. These minor slip-ups, though, won't keep anyone from being ensnared by *Dark Lily*.

Jill Allen