



Darling Girl

Terry H. Watkins

Green Writers Press (October 2018)

Softcover \$19.99 (189pp)

978-1-73226-624-7

Darling Girl is an often engrossing and heartbreaking story of neglect.

Terry H. Watkins's novel *Darling Girl* follows a girl through her dysfunctional childhood and toward escape.

The novel opens when DG is five. Her mother has a mental illness and is often sent to hospitals. Her father continually moves the family; he veers between doting on DG and ignoring her in favor of his friends, mistresses, and jobs. Though both sets of DG's grandparents are around to help, the task of caring for her younger brothers and mother most often falls to her. As she grows older and wiser, she realizes that her father is domineering and that this plays into her mother's perceived weaknesses. It becomes clear that getting away from her family is the only way that DG can save herself.

DG narrates. Her observations are both sharp and believably naive, and they evolve slowly over the course of the book. At first, the book does an excellent job of conveying DG's voice, capturing her childhood innocence and her devotion to her parents. She does not see the full picture. Seen through her limited perspective, her family's story unfolds in glimpses, hinting at their broader dysfunction. The text sets a steady pace when it comes to revelations, too. As DG matures, her narration matures, too, more closely revealing the true natures of others.

DG is a sympathetic lead. She walks a line between strength and confusion, never falling into the trap of being all hero or all victim. Other characters are rendered with less depth. DG's parents are stereotypes—a victim and a manipulative abuser. Her grandparents never emerge as distinct characters. Her brothers are addressed in vague terms; they are often indistinguishable from one another. Ancillary characters pop in and out of the story at random intervals, never making a real impact.

Individual chapters are paced well, but they do not come together. The book's timeline is muddled, and transitions between chapters are awkward. Chapters are headed with the years in which they take place; they follow chronologically, but without a strong sense of continuity. One chapter ends with DG living in the US and her mother in the hospital; the next opens with her mother at home and the family living somewhere different, without explanation of how they got there. As a result, each chapter reads like a short story, complete with its own beginning and ending; regarded together, they are less satisfying.

Darling Girl is an often engrossing and heartbreaking story of neglect.

ANGELA MCQUAY (December 7, 2018)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.