Clarion Review

Literary

Debacle
Dee Disheau
Trafford Publishing
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Breaking a mirror. Black cats passing in the road. Walking under a ladder. There are plenty of cultural indicators suggesting bad luck but perhaps none are more foreboding than being born on Friday the 13th. Which is exactly what happened to Todi, who had the unfortunate experience of being born a sickly girl on a hot, unlucky date to disappointed parents. It might seem silly to blame the day of one's birth for a lifetime of bad luck, but when reading the litany of disappointments and tragedies that befall Todi, one is certainly tempted to look towards her birthdate for an explanation.

Because neither parent wants her, Todi is sent to live with relatives, but when her biological mother has several more babies, four-year-old Todi is sent back to help with chores and child raising. To escape that brutal life she marries young and impulsively. Her own babies soon follow and Todi has to struggle against illness, childcare issues, small-town small mindedness, and exhaustion in her attempt to go to school, become a teacher, and save the lives of her children.

With hard work and sheer determination, Todi improves her life day by day, leaving behind her hometown, her ex-husband, and occasionally her children. As soon as her life seems to get better—new job, new apartment, new operation for a sick child—another calamity presents itself and things fall apart once again. But she never gives up.

Dee Disheau, an award-winning educator, writes with a breathless tone as if she has so much to say it all comes crowding out at once. Todi's character is a strong one; she is distinctive, exciting, and headstrong. However, she doesn't quite garner the sympathies of her readers; her boisterous attitude, while often admirable, sometimes comes across the page as crass and bullying. When her children begin to wander down lives of bad choices, it's hard not to blame their mother for her haphazard parenting. Had Todi been a more likable character,

readers may have been more moved by her tragedies.

Debacle also makes the mistake of focusing too narrowly on those tragedies. Towards the end of the book it's difficult not to be dulled by the continued onslaught of bad luck. There are too few glimmers of hope to contrast the negative events. Instead the novel becomes a list of everything bad that can happen in a life; the author would have been wise to focus more intently on just a few downfalls.

Disheau has obvious writing talent and should be encouraged to keep working on novels. She would do well to slow down and savor her words and events; then readers will be encouraged to do so as well.

Andi Diehn