

Destiny

Suzanne Knoebel

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Two deserted women forge a lifelong bond based on disappointment and subverted ambitions in a maternity ward when faced childbirth without their betraying men. Their daughters the dual protagonists react quite differently to neurotic upbringing. Rita becomes a dynamo of whims and will—prone to nude drunk driving and sex-based manipulation—but is well suited for the thoroughbred business she pursues. “Someone would kill her if she didn’t shape up particularly the roughnecks she attracted.” Diane is a focused self-empowered and service-oriented medical student who unwittingly fulfills her mother’s own derailed career dreams. She eschews pointless traditional barriers advising “...people who totally live their lives according to what is socially acceptable for whatever era they live in are lost souls.”

The main theme traces a continuum of evolving agency from passive acceptance to active ownership. Rita especially experiences transformation. Author Suzanne Knoebel steers the plot directly through the hot-button issues of pregnancy and abortion the latter of which is handled with evenhanded maturity. She even briefly addresses controversial end-of-life decisions. The settings are predominately pastoral horse farms with stops in Kentucky Florida Andalusia Australia and Rome. The remainder of scenes take place in finer homes and luxury hotels.

The highly charismatic character of Father Matthew an unorthodox Jesuit priest has his hands full keeping Diane from stress meltdown and trying to save a charitable foundation from crashing against the jagged rocks of family feuds. Playing against the stereotype Father Matthew avoids mention of patently religious ideology. An open-minded man he’s more concerned that people don’t self-destruct by obsessing on their failings.

A degree of structural ambiguity is the minor weakness of this otherwise satisfying novel. Conflicts facing Rita and Diane come from their poorly adjusted mothers from within and also occasionally from Rita’s ex-husband Nickolas Reed. The latter’s status as a villain is confirmed by references to his associates as “henchmen” but he fades into deep background for too long during the story’s middle stretch to generate steady tension. Situational clashes feature strategizing horse farm managers and Rita’s second husband who varies from unselfish to money-grubbing.

The author’s previous fiction includes three novels and two children’s books. Knoebel is an accomplished physician a professor emeritus at Indiana University and was the first female president of the American College of Cardiologists. Her professional publication credits are numerous.

Destiny shows individuals well into adulthood learning to take the reins and be the heroes of their own lives emerging from limitations imposed by guilt and the expectations of others. It asks readers to be aware of where personal judgments originate and projects hope for a continuing reduction of unfair barriers as a social by-product of the changing times.

TODD MERCER (August 8, 2007)

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