Clarion Review

General

Duncy
Dave Hamilton
Xlibris
978-1-4500-2456-3
Three Stars (out of Five)

The sad and volatile relationship between a boy and his mother is at the heart of *Duncy*, Dave Hamilton's first novel.

Diddy Hanson's mother resents him from the moment she learns of his existence. Conceited, self-centered, and firmly confident in the belief that she deserves the best of everything, Melda is horrified to discover her pregnancy, the result of a brief interlude with Mallic, an illiterate laborer. Though she reluctantly agrees to marriage, her resentment of both her husband and her son never fades and Diddy becomes the primary target of her rage.

From the time mother and son are reunited following an unanticipated separation during Diddy's early years, it is clear that Melda cannot seem to find it in her heart to love or accept her eldest child. A vicious cycle of emotional and physical abuse begins almost immediately and continues through his teen years. In spite of the efforts of caring social workers and grandparents, Diddy is subjected to his mother's wrath time and again. Melda beats and berates him for his resemblance to his father, who she still feels is beneath her, as well as for his inability to perform well at school. Melda is brutal in her torment, not only viciously attacking him on a regular basis, but encouraging his five younger siblings to stay away from him so that they won't be influenced by him.

While the story follows Diddy's life and trials, it is equally Melda's story. Her selfish cruelty is particularly disturbing when she smiles and charms social workers then quickly turns on her eldest son, beating him for humiliating her. She continues to be embarrassed by Diddy's father, who is also a frequent target of her anger. The one instance in which Mallic attempts to step in on his son's behalf, Melda turns on him, screaming "What you want me to do leave him to grow up a dunce arse like you?"

Hamilton tells an interesting if unsettling tale, and readers will find themselves drawn

into Diddy's sad story despite the troubling subject matter. Issues with the writing style, however, may prove more difficult to overcome. Hamilton's punctuation and grammatical errors betray a strong reliance on computer spellcheck programs and prove detrimental to the flow of the story. There are often shifts in tense from one sentence to the next, and run-on sentences and frequently cluttered dialogue may cause confusion. The story follows a timeline somewhat effectively, but occasionally seems aimless, a situation which is not helped by the abrupt ending.

In *Duncy*, Hamilton shows promise as a storyteller, particularly in the development of his characters, who come alive on the page with an ability to evoke emotion in the reader. The novel would certainly be worth the effort needed to pull it together more cohesively. A skilled editor is required to bring *Duncy* to the quality level the novel deserves. Nevertheless, the story is sure to touch readers and inspire compassion for Diddy's plight.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom