



Even in Paradise

Elizabeth Nunez

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The prose captivates the senses and makes one yearn for the dazzling seascape it describes so eloquently.

Fragile father-daughter and father-son bonds, pernicious sibling rivalry, the complexities of race relations: combine that with a Shakespearean element, and there's the formula for a rich and engaging story. But take note: there is nothing formulaic about this powerful and insightful novel that transports readers to the modern-day Caribbean, where loyalties are tested, truth can become obscured, and antiquated notions can lacerate relationships.

The protagonist is Émile Baxter, a college-age native Trinidadian who has a complex relationship with his father. Baxter, who is black, meets and befriends Albert, whose Christian family, though originating from Lebanon, has lived in Trinidad for generations.

Émile and Albert's lives become intertwined with the three white Ducksworth sisters, who are Caribbean natives to the core. The youngest, Corinne, has always had a special place in her widower father's heart. Ducksworth owns a beautiful home and lots of land in Barbados, the bulk of which he plans to leave to her in his will.

But when Corinne inadvertently hurts his feelings, he announces that he will disinherit her, leaving her cunning sisters to plot and scheme against her. Little does Ducksworth know that, with this act, he sets events into motion that lead to ill-fated consequences. Matters are made even more complicated when Corinne's sister, Glynis, becomes engaged to Albert, a relationship that raises Émile's suspicions.

Astute readers will note the parallels to Shakespeare's King Lear, the tragic story of a king who gives up his power and divides his kingdom among his three daughters. Good versus evil is another pervasive theme, such as when the hateful Glynis goes after the angelic Corinne. However, none of the characters are prototypes. They are flawed, multidimensional characters that are relatable.

The book covers a lot of ground without feeling overtaxing. The author deftly weaves Caribbean politics, privilege, and race into the story, inventing complicated relationships between parents, children, and lovers. The prose is simultaneously lyrical and conversational, captivating the senses and making one yearn for the dazzling seascape it describes so eloquently.

HILARY DANINHIRSCH (Summer 2016)

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