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Literary

Glorybound
Jessie Van Eerden
WordFarm
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Debut author creates a meticulously crafted story of damnation and redemption.

Jessie Van Eerden's debut novel follows the Lemleys, a West Virginia family once called upon to prophecy for God, but who seem to have fallen from grace. Sisters Crystal and Aimee hold the family together following the disappearance of their father, a charismatic preacher whose confidence fractured when Jesus failed to return on the day he predicted. Still, the girls wait, propped up by the outward signs of faith they've adopted: Crystal as a willing mute, Aimee in chastity.

As the novel begins, they've been in this holding pattern for a decade. Crystal's silence has rendered her a local curiosity, while Aimee's abstinence has attracted little attention at all, largely owing to her affectation of provocative clothing and behaviors. Newcomer Aubrey, in town for a post-graduate year of national service, is taken by the family, and by Aimee in particular. When he discovers that their father is languishing in the prison which shares the town's name, he pushes the family toward a reconciliation which none of them seem to want.

Coming together will force them all, including their ill-appreciated mother, Dotte, to confront the dark spots of their past. Was Preacher Lemley's survival of a lightning strike really a call from God? Is Aimee truly touched by the darkness her father identified in her as she moved into puberty? Can Crystal and her one-time love, Ronnie Sisler, who's back in town for a Pentecostal revival, offer each other any measure of the deliverance they once mutually avoided? Each must reevaluate their proclaimed beliefs if faith, and family, are to survive.

The chapters trade between the perspectives of each Lemley, and of Aubrey, who finds his future intertwined with theirs. Each character is exceptionally developed and singularly enticing. Van Eerden manages a truthful re-creation of Appalachian life, one which still preserves the dignity of her characters. Their poverty may be congenital, most have little to no

education, and their spiritual lives often seem to rely on superstition; but without shirking from these regional realities, the author succeeds in showing how they are also complex, thoughtful, and self-possessed.

Readers are made sympathetic to the deep longing of the sisters, in particular, and are certain to invest in their growth toward liberation. The author displays a stunning attention to detail, and the sensuousness of her prose is bound to enrapture her readership. Evocative, tactile phrases are aplenty: “she unlatched the suitcase, and out poured the musty smell of waiting,” “her sin was the tar kind,” and the sound of finger-worn covered buttons scattering like bits of broken glass are all given in the span of a few pages. The salt and smoke of jerky, the dairy-esque curdling of disappointed hopes; the author captures these ephemeral sensations and so much more.

Lyrical, heartbreaking, and dazzling in its unobtrusive authenticity, Van Eerden’s first novel is an affecting delight.

Michelle Anne Schingler