ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Grace
Todd Blair
AuthorHouse
978-1-4520-0479-2
Three Stars (out of Five)

Nineteen-year-old Grace Fields is the type of young woman many would envy. A good student with a loving family, Grace is so attractive that "her radiant natural beauty made many men and some women blush as if their impure thoughts were published across their foreheads." Friendly and outgoing, her spirit and dreams are crushed one night when she is assaulted on her way home from the library.

The ensuing courtroom drama, a relative's tragic accident, and further personal trials challenge Grace's resilience as she struggles to rebuild her life in the aftermath of her attack. In the course of the investigation she meets sheriff's deputy Ron Miller, with whom she shares a mutual attraction. Circumstances continuously bring the two together and a tentative romance develops as Grace recovers from her trauma and Ron faces his own issues, which include a reluctance to commit and an unexpected health crisis.

The romance between Grace and Ron has a sweet innocence many readers may find appealing. Their hesitation in becoming involved with one another rings true, making their eventual triumph over their fears more poignant.

The seeds of a good story exist here, and author Todd Blair makes a valiant effort to pull it all together, but the tale is ultimately undermined by its brevity and too many amateur mistakes. Punctuation and structural errors abound, and a reliance on spell-check programs is evidenced by the misuse of words such as "there" and "their." A smoother narrative flow, tighter focus, and more attention to character interaction would also engage readers more successfully.

Blair, a hiking and outdoors enthusiast, includes several scenes of camping and hiking trips with effectively detailed description. The amount of space given to minor details such as the contents of Grace's lunch or unnecessary backstory distracts, however, and irrelevant and often stilted dialogue peppers these scenes and others, doing little to advance the storyline.

The powerful subjects Blair touches upon, including rape and cancer, merit a greater depth of writing. While treated with sensitivity and compassion, they are simply not given

enough attention to prove compelling. Certain situations are glossed over and leave the reader questioning the credibility of significant moments, such as the likelihood that a woman's first intimate experience following a sexual assault would occur without a thought or mention of the traumatic memory. Forfeiting the gratuitous dialogue and superfluous details in favor of further dramatizing these more pertinent scenes would greatly improve the story.

Both Grace and Ron are sympathetic and likeable, and the author's enthusiasm and empathy for the characters and subjects he explores is evident. However, Grace currently reads like a rough draft in need of a meticulous line editing. The story has potential and would be worth the effort of a thorough professional critique. While more discerning readers will find the various missteps difficult to toil through, those with the patience to overlook the novice errors may enjoy the simplicity and romance at the heart of *Grace*.

Jeannine Chartier Hanscom