ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

GENERAL

Let Death Be an End
Robert A. Wilson
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Three Stars (out of Five)

Let Death Be An End is a psychological drama of family with a reach into the criminal underworld of New York and Chicago. On one level it's also the romance of Brooklyn businessman Arthur Williams and Lucy a former Nebraskan with a rack of skeletons in the closet and a fetishistic attachment to a powder blue peignoir. Lucy Williams operates in a reality far divergent from the approximate norms but knows what mainstream behavior consists of and is a skilled mimic when she is being observed. In one-to-one conversation her pleasure is to throw the other person way off balance as in the following pre-marriage exchange with a boyfriend who asks:

> *'What type of work do you do?'*
> *She smiled at him warmly 'I'm a prostitute!' Her expression never changed as she continued to smile. She saw the confusion on his face…*

A successful businessman with enterprises in construction and the manufacturing of electronics Arthur is plucky and tenacious. He goes against a nationwide organized crime syndicate to maintain an independent Builders' Association angering elite wiseguys. Chapters set in Chicago show Mob tentacles reaching through all ranks of law enforcement and government; even Arthur's friends are not all to be trusted. Professionally adroit it is said that "'He has the innocence of a virgin bridegroom and the cunning of a devil.'" In Lucy's presence he's entirely different: borderline codependent eager to please granting a great deal of indulgent latitude. He is willfully blind to his wife's seductions of much older men many of whom meet afterward with fatal accidents or street violence. Her outrageous smashing of taboos goes long unchecked.

The couple's four children are not protected from the effects of a deep-seated mental illness. Harry the younger son whom Arthur grooms as a successor suffers particularly in Lucy's

care. Arthur should have every reason to suspect that some of the children are not his blood but Lucy stores this bomb for the moment of maximum impact.

One aspect which works well is the fact that Lucy's degree of malevolence and unreliability is fully revealed only after the reader begins with a fairly sympathetic idea of the character leaving an aftertaste of complexity. The middle portion of the book is the most engaging: a corruption-raking newspaper reporter named Jack Westbrook aggressively gathers information on the Mob as Lucy quietly renews her ties to dangerous old associates. The reporter is nicely delineated. The order in which the longish story is told beginning with an argument between grown sons at a funeral is not arranged to the best advantage. Copy issues could have used a bit more attention.

Good men and less honorable ones are drawn to their ruin while Arthur delays decisive action. Lies are uncovered and Lucy's already spotty self-control weakens. The Mob at first peripheral begins to close in. Readers sensing impending wreckage can either pull for an unlikely aversion or try to predict the extent of damage.