ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

HUMOR

LIFESTYLE: A Tale of Upscale Suburbia, and a Girl
Simon Plaster
Mossik Press
978-0-615-72331-0
Three Stars (out of Five)

In Simon Plaster's third novel starring Henryetta Hebert, readers get the amusing send-up of modern America, a satire of something which itself is a satire. This time, the protagonist has been charged with locating missing archives from the *Weekly Weekender*, the local newspaper of Chelmsford Heights, Oklahoma. Heightsters, as the author refers to the townsfolk, are both characters and caricatures. They are well-rounded people who possess exaggerated traits and do ludicrous things: an old codger resides in the local mall and peppers his speech with Yiddish in an attempt to make Henryetta believe he is Jewish; the local police chief, who has a history of blowing things out of proportion, arrests Henryetta at first sight in part because she believes that the young woman's car is suspicious. While Chelmsford Heights and its denizens mock the pretensions of suburbs all over the country, the town's own ridiculousness is often observed by Henryetta, making the story's humor work on multiple levels.

As Plaster introduces key players in the town's goings-on, each remains quirky and fascinating as their individual paths collide with and veer away from Henryetta's. Since she plays the proverbial "straight man" in the plot, it's a shame that the reader doesn't hear more of the story from this earnest, likeable woman who dreams of becoming a serious journalist. It is especially fun to read her point of view when she thinks about her current situation as though it were a news article; for example, she looks at her situation objectively, referring to herself in the third person as *this reporter.*Unfortunately, though, this book seems like a choir in which the titular girl lacks enough solos. Sometimes, a Heightster narrates about Henryetta, instead of Henryetta telling her own story. Henryetta's diction is consistently plainspoken and folksy without being grating. Only a few slip-ups of harsh profanity mark her otherwise realistic speech.

In general, paragraphs in the book are overly long, sometimes going on for more than a page. This is a shame because readers may feel bogged down and skip over some witty turns of phrase or delightfully snarky asides that the author is able to pump out with stunning frequency. The use of a different font in one chapter makes its contents difficult to read and there seems to

be no explanation for this change. Toward the end of the novel, the author inexplicably uses the image of a gate similar to the one on the front cover of the book to denote the beginning of a new section. These issues aside, *Lifestyle* will make anyone chuckle who sees the idiosyncracies in the American way of life.

Jill Allen