Clarion Review

General

Memories of Sad Brown Eyes
Deborah Barclay
978-1-4259-7673-6
Four Stars (out of Five)

A key member of the Florida governor's inner circle undertakes a bevy of self-serving illegal acts launching a chain of events which causes suffering of innocents discord and even death across an ocean and over many years.

The trouble in *Memories of Sad Brown Eyes* begins not in November of 2000 but in the sway of an old-boy network following the Second World War. Twenty-something Jasmine is a sharp can-do office manager for the fatherly Governor Davis. She struggles to retain authority over Harley a savvy kiss up / kick down young politico with fixations on power wealth and Jasmine herself. A vacation to Havana Cuba holds romance for Jasmine; she meets her future husband out dancing at the Tropicana. Soon baby Savanna the book's narrator is born. When Harley learns that he's been passed over in love he sets out to systematically frighten control and manipulate Jasmine's entire family.

The frilly-collared girl on the tasteful front cover who appears cautious and uncertain is Savanna. The passport stamps represent the years she is forced to hide in Italy and Switzerland for safety reasons and is presumed deceased back in Florida. Savanna as a child is a victim of physical abuse and is generally overlooked by her indefinitely stunned mother. As a plucky young adult she leverages her looks and social skills to engineer a strike back:

> *I knew that God had a plan for me and it was to help others but I somehow felt I could make getting even…fit that plan.*

Savanna shares her account of tragedy with long-lost Georgian cousins. Although the cousins are useful particularly Elli providing philosophical context and fleshing out Savanna's roots some of the topics raised between them are tangents not crucial to the central struggle. One worthwhile alley is the morality of revenge. Savannah has learned that the infliction of damage

tends to have unintended consequences:

You cannot destroy just one person. Everyone is affected.

As a framing device much past action is presented as monologue to present-time listeners. This story has the ring of a roman &224; clef. *Memories of Sad Brown Eyes* demonstrates the broad swathe of damage wrought by the deviously ambitious. Readers will watch with horror as the protagonist's innocent nature is threatened first from without and finally from within.

Todd Mercer