

Moon Child: Plagued by Seven

Fefi Monje

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Born with a curse, tested in love and war, this Moon Child shines a light on life through much of the twentieth century.

Supposedly born under a curse in a poor rural Mississippi community, Melissa Dukes rises beyond her neglected childhood to become a self-sufficient Southern woman whose life is complicated by her search for true love. Though faced intermittently with tragic circumstances that would make a lesser person succumb, she forges gracefully on in a story that offers an entertaining and detailed picture of what life was like in the not-so-distant past.

Born just prior to the Great Depression, the narrator details growing up as the seventh daughter of a religious fanatic father who kept his children isolated from the “evils” of the world. Eventually escaping when she is sixteen, Melissa makes her way to Mobile, Alabama, with a friend's family. Melissa—so naïve to the normal way of things—comes of age during World War II, when she meets young, handsome Jim, who sweeps her off her feet. They marry, and shortly after he enlists. It's just the beginning of a series of disastrous events, dominated by the fact that his family will not accept her.

Told in first person, the narrator chronicles Melissa's life up to 1977, recounting the people, places, and events that have shaped her. The first several chapters detail Melissa's childhood and her family's background, including the mention of a neighbor girl, Molly Rosenberg, who was sent from her native Germany to live with her grandparents who'd immigrated to Mississippi years before. A flu epidemic preceded her and “the only glimpse Molly had of her grandparents was in their pine box coffins at their double funeral.” When *Moon Child* offers nuggets like these, the book really works; later on, when Melissa tracks her husband's infidelities, those chapters come across as more strident and harsh.

Because Melissa is connected to the military, her story depicts the atmosphere during WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War, as in her description of Mobile: “The shortage of men and materials and the devastating war changed this slow-moving beautiful city to a hustle. People were in a run or a fast pace to do everything. Whether it was to catch a city bus or stand in line for rationed or difficult-to-obtain items, they were always in a rush.”

The novel would benefit from additional proofreading. Mistakes in editing pop up, distracting from the many interesting characters encountered (such as Aunt Cardui, the local midwife) and life situations crafted by author Fefi Monje. The action moves along appropriately, although Melissa's younger days do seem more descriptive than her later years.

The shifts between an omniscient narrator and a first-person narrator in the book's opening is perplexing, but when Melissa tells the remainder of the story, it is easier to follow. Additionally, the book's title could be confusing. It refers to the zodiac sign Melissa was born under, and her supposed curse with the number seven, but, at first glance, some might assume the novel is science fiction.

Though she came from a background that left much to be desired, the narrator overcame the odds and became successful in life. It's appropriate that in the final pages, she returns once again to her hometown to visit the ghosts of

her past.

ROBIN FARRELL EDMUNDS (October 8, 2013)

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