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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

One Passion

Teresa B. Matvejs
Dorrance Publishing (Feb 20, 2010)
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Pulling back the curtain of an Australian traveling circus, Teresa B. Matvejs shows readers a world of secrets and struggles in *One Passion*.

Though the circus is everything Rose Vitkovskis knows and loves, it has also become a source of tremendous pain and personal restriction. As the circus begins to crumble, Rose must find the strength and courage to move on to another life with her family, even if it means leaving the life—and man—she loves.

Rose's depiction of circus life is clearly influenced by the author's own experiences as a former circus performer and animal trainer. Matvejs includes anecdotes and intricacies about Rose's performance that only an insider could know. The seedier, less romanticised aspects of traveling in a desert also lend authenticity to the novel.

The overarching topics about circus life and its challenges, as well as Rose's individual story, are creative. They have the potential to come together into a unique, even inspiring piece. Comic scenes depicting the chaos of the circus and the antics of its denizens give some color and life to the narrative.

However, the execution of the novel overall falls a bit short. The same comic scenes are not well-integrated into the narrative. After the major turning point of the novel, plot points are on a rushed timeline, yet still meander along and resolve too readily to be realistic. Chapters sometimes break scenes at awkward rather than suspenseful points.

The characters, like the plot, are interesting and have truly rich backstories. The intense relationships they have with each other are critical to understanding Rose and her ties to the circus, but occasionally feel inauthentic. Dialogue overall can be melodramatic and a tad clichéd, with phrases like "your words have just opened my eyes."

The writing in general also has a tendency to get repetitive. Matvejs often has so many emotions and ideas to share that she doesn't always take the time to fully develop and illustrate them, relying on adjectives like "passionately" instead of really describing sensations. Potentially funny, tense, or dramatic moments can occasionally feel like simple retellings.

Though not always clearly imagined, there is something endearing about Rose and her dreams and desires. After all, many people have felt the sting of life's disappointments and injustices, the frustrations of personal limitations and obligations, and the deep hope for the fulfillment of their dreams.

Though her writing may have some flaws in this book, there is no doubt that Matvejs has a passion for storytelling and the potential to create rich, compelling books.

ALICIA SONDHI (June 18, 2012)

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