



Pleasantview

Celeste Mohammed

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Through the interlocking stories of *Pleasantview*, Celeste Mohammed creates a microcosm of a Trinidad rarely seen by tourists.

Sunil, an escaped prisoner; Consuela, the prostitute he loves; Mr. Jagroop, Consuela's influential client; Omar, Mr. Jagroop's employee; and Ivy, a domestic-turned-self-styled-"seer," are a few of the characters who appear in subsequent narratives. Although the characters vary in age, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, they are all connected, in some way, to the Syrian Mr. H., an aspiring politician notorious for his sexual appetites.

While Mr. H. exerts his power by forcing himself on whomever he pleases, other characters, including Gail, a young woman raped by Mr. H. while in his employ, and Luther, a Trinidadian in New York City in need of a green card, attempt to use their sexuality for personal betterment. When Gail finds herself pregnant with the married Mr. H.'s child, she thinks she has it made: "No more stepping over shit-smelling drains, no more bullets popping all hours of the night." But, of course, things aren't that simple. An assassination occurs, and its repercussions are far-reaching.

While each chapter is self-contained, recurring characters and a consistent setting create a sense of unity. Even those who leave, like Mr. H.'s often mentioned daughter Kimberley, who has been living in Barbados with a woman lover, return to the island. By the end, the novel forms a satisfying whole.

Luxuriant language provides the atmosphere. A variety of points-of-view and dialects differentiate characters and demonstrate versatility. Occasional words in non-English languages and colloquial expressions help to recreate the multicultural vibe of the island. Details—mangoes, iguanas, sea turtles, cinnamon bark, and calypso—evoke the sights, scents, sounds, and tastes of the island.

In her virtuosic literary debut, Celeste Mohammed reveals the dark underbelly of a lush tropical island.

SUZANNE KAMATA (May / June 2021)

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