Clarion Review

General

Prose in the Key of Life: Volume One, Four Short Stories
Roland P. Joseph
CreateSpace
978-1-4538-4816-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

Even with global connectivity—Internet, satellite television, cell phones—quite often the best way to become immersed in another culture is through a book.

Prose in the Key of Life attempts to showcase life on the islands of Trinidad and Tobago, where wealth, poverty, hope, and despair drive wedges between those people trying to live an honest life and their neighbors who seek to make fortunes off the bad luck of others.

In "The Kidnap Miracle", Roland P. Joseph introduces his readers to Pearl Rampersand who tries to make her own life a little more bearable by seducing a younger man. Lust has consequences, however. Her lover arranges to have her daughter kidnapped and Pearl's world is nearly demolished. Meanwhile, the ransom money falls into the hands of a young girl who uses it to provide better for her baby, the son of the kidnapper.

In "Secrets of a Frantic Housewife," Chandra Lutchman will stop at nothing to secure a spot in the inner social circle of her neighborhood. When a face from her past moves onto the block, her social future is threatened by a dirty little secret.

Whether he's writing about a young man on the path to stardom or an older housewife dissatisfied with her marriage, Joseph has obvious empathy for his characters. He also has the remarkable ability to slip into and out of the persona of each character and maintain voice and tone, even when several different points of view enter into a story. All of which adds richness to the stories.

However, a few structural problems may impair complete enjoyment of *Prose in the Key of Life*. The plot of the stories often feels jagged; events suddenly jump with little or no transition and readers may be left feeling discombobulated while they try to catch up.

"The Kidnap Miracle," for example, begins with a description of a woman being kidnapped. She is snatched from bed, thrown into a hole, and left on another bed. A man leaves

her a newspaper. Before readers can make much sense of the events, the plot jumps to two friends with a secret, and then to the bored housewife who decides to have an affair. The story never returns to the girl held captive, never reveals her identity except to later point out that she was Pearl Rampersand's daughter. If readers were welcome to linger in between narrative transitions they might form stronger attachments to the characters. As it is, the quick transitions and dangling plot lines inspire frustration.

Though *Prose in the Key of Life* has some textual issues, Joseph should be encouraged to continue his writing career and to share the stories of his islands with the rest of the world. It's voices like his that help our global community evolve into an entity better than the sum of its parts.

Andi Diehn