



Clarion Review

Literary

Providence Pond

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Anancybooks

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Four Stars (out of Five)

Love and marriage faith betrayal kindness selfishness and tolerance are just some of the thematic riches that surface in this multigenerational saga set in Jamaica. Linked together by the body of water which keeps their farms fertile the families of Providence explore their relationships with one another and their goals in life.

As the book opens Afia is heartbroken because her bridegroom Bem disappeared right after their wedding. Her best friend tries to console her but neither is prepared for the events that take place after Vijay Boydell and Aren Tyler find Afia naked one night at the Pond. Vijay bitter at what he sees as Bem's theft of Afia from him later visits Afia and gets her pregnant. This sets in motion a pattern of behavior in which children are treated like inferiors or outright outcasts—a pattern that is repeated in the next generations as personal relationships become more and more entwined and complicated.

Enter Asa King the Kumina leader who announces his desire to start a new Family in Providence. Kumina an African religion involves caring for the bodies of the dead so that ancestral spirits can speak through those bodies. Denounced in Jamaica by the English and persecuted by Christians Kumina was regarded with great suspicion and even fear; Asa nonetheless seeks to establish a new Kumina community and he brings his children Congo and Miss Hene to act as Father and Mother to the new group.

This is a fascinating if sometimes hard to follow story about people who persevere despite enormous challenges. Readers ignorant of Jamaican history and Kumina will have to make frequent trips to the author's Afterword for explanations. Yet his characters are warm and interesting and readers will want to learn what happens to Congo Ulu and Laura; Ama and Leroy; Yoofi and Charm and even Shep the dog. Other fascinating personalities such as Puncus St. John who is a Kumina Dancer and the proprietor of the Any Questions tavern; Doctor

Devinder Singh who writes the death certificates for the deceased members of the Kumina Family who Walk; Monsignor Silva; Detective Graham; and Reverend Watkins are interwoven throughout the story. The characters mature and change as people do and if their actions sometimes seem illogical their forbearance and endurance are admirable—as is their growth.

While some characters fail to redeem themselves as people often do others undergo transformations that are truly remarkable. Warm and caring *Providence Pond* is a novel about a truly exotic world that readers will be pleased to come to know.