ForeWord Reviews
**Clarion Review**

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

**Royal Pain**
Ashley Brow
iUniverse
978-1-4401-3359-6
Three Stars (out of Five)

"He's going to die…and it's going to be your fault." When Princess Christa hears this chilling prophecy, she fears it refers to her secret boyfriend, Daemen, a peasant who works as a groundskeeper at her castle. Christa and Daemen are deeply in love, but their relationship which crosses societal norms, faces opposition from individuals like Christa's cold-hearted father and Phabian, the nasty prince who intends to marry her. Their quest to be together and escape the prophecy drives the plot in this romantic fantasy novel.

First-time author Ashley Brow combines intriguing magical elements—like a mirror that shows the future and spell-countering amulets—with a realistic depiction of the lives of adolescent girls, ranging from nasty social rivalries to clever beauty tips. The story's "star-crossed lovers" plot fits right into the fantastical romance genre that is so popular with adolescent girls.

While the premise is promising, frequent asides in which an omniscient narrator explains a character's feelings and motives distract from the momentum of the plot. This bogs down the story as it meanders toward a satisfyingly happy ending for the sympathetic main characters. Substituting more dialogue and shared experiences between the characters would increase the action of the story and add dimensionality to the characters. For example, these insights, from a passage where Christa's thoughts explain her difficult relationship with her father, would make dramatic fuel for a heated royal argument:

> *William had never wanted a daughter. He had wanted a son to carry on the family name like every traditional nobleman. And Christa wasn't the type of daughter he would have wanted anyway. And she was almost identical to her mother. She now understood how hard it must be for him to look at her without*

> *some form of hatred for the inadequate imprint of his wife's image she represented.*

While the publisher categorizes this book as "juvenile fiction," the ages of the main characters and adolescent themes will resonate better with teenagers. In its present form, this book is best suited for patient, persistent readers with a real passion for romantic fantasy. Another round of editing to tighten the plot and address minor grammatical errors would do much to enhance the appeal of this novel for a wider audience.