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Young Adult Fiction

Silhouette of a Sparrow
Molly Beth Griffin
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In the summer lake town of Excelsior, Minnesota, sixteen-year-old Garnet Grace Richardson comes face-to-face with the adult world of possibilities and danger. Set in 1926, Garnet's parents agree to send her to stay with wealthy distant relations, Mrs. Harrington and her daughter, so that her mother might have one last chance to rehabilitate Garnet's father from the psychological effects of war. For her part, Garnet will have the opportunity to see something of the wider world before returning to the domestic and dutiful life she sees laid out for her. Despite her adventuresome spirit, when Garnet embarks on this journey to Excelsior she is yet uncertain, a nod to the competing forces that exist in a young person itching to venture out, while also wanting to remain part of the secure and comforting world of childhood.

But Garnet quickly rises to the occasion and is almost fearless in her challenge to see the amusement park, the forbidden dance hall—even get a job—despite the disapproval, as well as more immediate obstacles, presented by various relations. Here the novel starts to flounder as Garnet too easily becomes simply the plucky heroine, striving to overcome circumstance without much hesitation or deliberation. The lack of complexity becomes particularly apparent when Garnet falls in love with the beautiful, free-spirited Isabella, who introduces her not only to the world of love and passion, but, because it is a bond between two women, a slice of that world not widely accepted in their time. It is to the novel's credit that it does not approach this romance cautiously or with explanation. But given how the narrative touches on issues of social hierarchy and acceptable behavior, it seems to shortchange itself by not showing more of a struggle within Garnet to square her love for Isabella with a fear of being ostracized.

Happily, this story does not depend solely on the tension of a budding sexual relationship to define its energy. The romance develops quickly, but Garnet is left to face other challenges. She dreams of college as her parents struggle. She grows less interested in returning to marry the boy back home. Garnet fights and falters, but ultimately prevails. Through these successes, the

book encourages its readers to be more than just what the world wants them to be.

Silhouette of a Sparrow is Molly Beth Griffin's first novel, and fans of young adult fiction will enjoy its quiet drama. It does not resort to fantastical events to tickle the imagination, but rather dips into a world gone by—a time when American society and its female citizens were particularly eager to redefine their futures.

Jennifer Williams