ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

Sugar Land
Joni Rodgers
Spinster's Ink
978-1-883523-32-9
(May 1999)

In her second novel, Houstonian Rodgers serves up a humorous and touching modern day fairy tale about two sisters trying to reclaim their lives. As young girls singing the blues in hot gold lamé, Kitty and Kiki Smithers were raised in the Texas spotlight. Twenty-five years later, however, they awaken to find themselves mothers in lousy marriages and unfulfilling lives. As they struggle to reclaim their lives from the many expectations about to swallow them whole, Kitty and Kiki must relearn how to sing the blues if they are to emerge from the shallow fragments of their lives.

Rodgers uses several recurring images to build her tale. Of particular interest is the myth of Psyche and Eros that she weaves into the novel as the favorite girlhood fairy tale of Kitty and Kiki. This story of gods, goddesses, beauty and love, is juxtaposed with the reality of laundry, mothers-in-law cheating husbands and stenciled tulips. While the infusion of Psyche's story into Kitty and Kiki's lives does lend a fairy tale air to an otherwise ordinary story it does not seem to be developed to its fullest potential. Nor does the Smithers' story lend a new interpretation to the Greek myth. Rather the myth serves to glorify the story of Kitty and Kiki; turning them into modern day goddesses. The result, while entertaining, is not particularly enlightening or complex.

At best Rodgers' writing is witty and inventive. She writes, "Even when he was coming home, his kisses felt like leaving, and their lovemaking had settled into a well-worn groove that circumvented lips and limbs, plotting the most direct course between the useful portions of their torsos, his straight line and her triangle, like safety-railed boardwalks around the organic dangers of a national park." The dialogues are humorous and bittersweet and the infusion of blues lyrics and Texas dialect adds richness and texture to the story. Overall, the novel moves with a steady swinging pace that engages the reader.

Sugar Land opens and closes with the ease of a fairy tale. Enter two beautiful sisters. Enter an abusive husband, an evil stepmother, a tornado and a trailer park. In the end everyone gets what they deserve: the bad guys are punished, the sisters reclaim their lives stronger and

wiser and find love to boot! Rodgers' rich witty writing in combination with a touching story make for a highly entertaining novel.

Jennifer Sperry