FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ GENERAL FICTION

The Burning Veil

Jean Grant
Mishmish Press (May 30, 2010)
Hardcover $29.95 (360pp)
978-0-9825074-0-7

The novelist Eudora Welty said, “Writers and travelers are mesmerized alike by knowing of their destinations.” That could easily be the epigraph for Jean Grant’s finely crafted new novel *The Burning Veil*. The story of an American woman’s introduction to Saudi Arabian culture, *The Burning Veil* avoids clichés of the Middle East, and finds a compassionate thread in even the most conservative of its characters—from Muslim extremists to American racists. Grant, a former journalist who lived in the Middle East for 20 years, takes on touchy subjects with a deft, professional touch, and is careful not to foist her political agenda on the reader. Her novel connects two vastly different societies, showing that love and mutual respect is the best way to coexist.

Dr. Sarah Moss, redheaded, outgoing, and American as apple pie, meets Ibrahim Suleiman while he’s on a student visa in her hometown in Wisconsin. Sarah is drawn to Ibrahim’s otherness, but also feels completely comfortable with him. “She thought of Ib’s nuanced way of thinking and his endearing quirks: the way he would place his palm on his chest, bow his head and close his eyes when he said thank you; the way he never looked at his watch or seemed to be in a hurry; the way he sent her glorious bouquets all the way from Hawaii.” Sarah eagerly accepts a short-term position in Ibrahim’s family’s clinic in Saudi Arabia, hoping to test the waters of their relationship. Can she really marry someone from such a different culture? Could she ever fit into Muslim culture, where women are veiled and secluded?

The Burning Veil is a compelling novel, a new look at Saudi Arabia and its customs through the eyes of a Western woman. Sarah is a balanced, thoughtful narrator—she keeps an open mind at all times, even when she disagrees with the beliefs of her Muslim hosts. When the dialogue turns stiff or too political, Grant’s descriptions keep the story flowing. “On a chest in the corner of the tent was a basin with lukewarm water, and Sarah washed, pulled on her jeans, tossed an abaya over her shoulders, and stepped out. Instead of the eternal flat blue sky, a cloud floated above, fleecy white above the rippled sands; it was a perfect day for a jaunt in the desert.”

Grant lets the images in *The Burning Veil* do most of the work, and the novel is a delight to read. Sarah’s adventures in Khobar are personal, emotional—but also speak to larger themes of love, forgiveness, compatibility, and justice.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (August 5, 2010)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The author of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have his/her book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Review make no guarantee that the author will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission’s 16 CFR, Part 255.