Clarion Review

LGBT

The Butterfly Lady
Danny M. Hoey, Jr.
Flaming Giblet Press
978-1-939675-00-2
Four Stars (out of Five)

At times poetic, and always redolent of the blues, *The Butterfly Lady* is a brilliant portrayal of the anguish of being a black, gay man in a world incapable of recognizing the humanity of one deemed an outsider.

When the Butterfly Lady's throat was slit, everyone knew there would be no investigation. No questions would be asked. A black man in a dress was dead, and it was nothing to residents of a Cleveland, Ohio, community still trying to erase the memories of the stench of blood and the sight of bodies in flames that had filled their nightmares since the 1966 Hough riots.

Danny M. Hoey's poignant tale traces the life of the man known as the Butterfly Lady, from his early awareness that he was different from those around him to his untimely death, recounting how Gabriel could remember the very first time he had tried his mother's makeup—how he had felt closer to her wearing it—and how violently angry it had made his Christian-zealot father. Insisting on his right to be true to himself, Gabriel leaves his home for a neighborhood in Cleveland, where he attempts to be both mother and father to the lost souls around him, and where he comes to accept that he cannot mend them. The anguish of unrequited love—of child for parent, woman for man, and man for man—is etched into the hearts of all of the characters in *The Butterfly Lady*—and their obsessive and misplaced efforts to fill the hollowness within them leads to tragedy.

When Thurman, a young closeted gay man who has known and secretly loved Gabriel for many years, finally has the opportunity to express that love, Gabriel's greatest strength is revealed. Thurman challenges him, saying, "You are a man wearing a dress and makeup." Gabriel, clasping his hands together and resting his chin upon them, shakes his head slightly and responds, "See, you have me confused. I am not a man in a dress. I am me."

The story is attractively packaged, and it bears a message that needs to be heard. But while it is, for the most part, beautifully written, there are a few lapses in consistency in the use of dialect. For example, Gabriel may say, "She all wrapped up in that man of hers," and in another passage speak in complete sentences. There is also a question about whether the author might have intended to use "exorcise" where "exercise" is written. These are issues that can easily be corrected.

Hoey's writing is tight, intense, and sharp-edged as he leads readers to the place where worlds—gay and straight, male and female, black and white, adult and child—collide. This is a book that would be good to read more than once, as the threads between the various characters become clearer with a second reading, and subtle nuances shine even more brightly.

Readers will not easily forget Hoey's gentle, haunting protagonist, and they may even find themselves inclined to look with greater compassion upon the people around them, especially those who are different from themselves.

Kristine Morris