ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

The Eleanor Roosevelt Girls
Bonnie Bluh
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From the author of Woman to Woman, Banana and The Old Speak Out comes The Eleanor Roosevelt Girls. It is the saga of a group of girls from a lower middle class neighborhood in Sunnyside, Queens, New York, who form a club as schoolgirls and maintain their friendships—or at least their togetherness throughout the rest of their lives. The novel focuses particularly on two of the girls: Julia and Mallory, best friends from age seven.

Mallory has asked Julia, the ever-obliging best friend, almost always willing to back the wilder Mallory in her plans, to gather all their friends for a party after Mallory's death. At the time of Mallory's death, the guest list includes the Eleanor Roosevelt Girls, many of whom Julia hasn't seen in twenty years. So Julia searches out the now-scattered group while remembering all the women have been through together. It's a lot—just about every tragedy and many of the triumphs women as a group have faced throughout the latter half of the twentieth century: child abuse, incest, battery, career success, early marriage, divorce, successful romance and relationships, children. One of the women becomes a nun; one stays in Sunnyside and recreates the world of her parents? generation, maintaining that nothing has changed. One comes out as a lesbian. One uses her experience of childhood abuse to help others. This seems to be too many pivotal, life-changing events for one novel.

Bluh's easy, conversational writing style makes The Eleanor Roosevelt Girls very readable, but the lack of focus makes the work a less powerful story than it could be. The book is reminiscent of Anna Quindlen's Black and Blue, but the plethora of issues involved clouds them all. To her credit, Bluh does consistently return to Julia and Mallory's friendship. In one of the most interesting angles of the book, Bluh explores the line between friendship and romance between women, and how these two sides of a relationship can blend together. Had she focused on that, or one of the other many issues she touches on, The Eleanor Roosevelt Girls could have had the depth of a great book. As it is, it is a captivating if not memorable novel appropriate for women of all ages.

Celeste Sollod