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Clarion Review ★★★☆☆ LITERARY

The Equilibrist III: The Quibbler

Erasmus Cromwell-Smith
Erasmus Press
(229pp)
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Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II's The Equilibrist III *brings a series honoring two unusual, gifted people and their abiding love to a satisfying close.*

Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II's *The Equilibrist, Part III: The Quibbler* continues the tender saga of Professor Erasmus Cromwell-Smith Sr.'s life, beginning with the unexplained disappearance of his beloved Victoria.

Victoria's unexpected flight took place while Cromwell-Smith Sr. and she were students at Harvard, and his frantic search for her proves futile. Focusing on the forty years of their separation, the book is intriguing. Shadowy antiquarians who are Cromwell-Smith's mentors appear at crucial moments in the story to provide timeless perspectives on life, love, and loss. The wisdom gleaned from antique books of poetry and philosophy guide Cromwell-Smith Sr. to carry on with his life as best he can.

Also a dedicated university professor, Cromwell-Smith Sr. creates an ingenious method of making poetry and timeless wisdom come to life for his students through the medium of his own life story. His unconventional methods guarantee his popularity, though the book's portrayal of his students is unrealistic. They are rarely shown to question him, and they never challenge him; instead, they admire their teacher and ponder what they have learned.

Flowing though dry, the narrative jumps between the present and the couple's forty years of separation. Its medium is flashbacks; locations and dates are given in the headings for each section, so the chronology is clear, though two different dates for their separation are given. An author's statement that he never met his biological parents is confusing and is not resolved until near the end of the book.

An air of mystery surrounds Victoria's flight, provoking curiosity regarding the struggles of the principal characters as they try to understand and resolve their personal and relationship difficulties. Cromwell-Smith Sr. employs an intellectual, rational means of coping, coupled with avoidance; Victoria proves insecure and is manipulated by those stronger than herself. Secrets surrounding their activities during their separation are kept for decades, and the book does not reveal what went on in their lives until they confess to each other once they're reunited. A cancer diagnosis is a shadowy element throughout the book.

Dialogue and descriptions range from poetic to cerebral, as does the book's tone. Punctuation errors, especially with commas, are frequent and distracting, as are missing, misused, misspelled, and poorly chosen words.

Erasmus Cromwell-Smith II's *The Equilibrist III* brings a series honoring two unusual, gifted people and their abiding love to a satisfying close, testifying to the power of story to transmit timeless wisdom and to the ability of art and beauty to provide balance in stormy times.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September 11, 2019)

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