

The Ordinary Girl

Carol Ann Iacofano

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In her debut novel, *The Ordinary Girl*, Carol Ann Iacofano explores the life of a member of the largest and often most ignored minority—people with disabilities. Like her protagonist Payton, Iacofano has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. For both the author and Payton, their disability affects their lives, but neither woman is defined by it. This story follows Payton as she juggles romance, sibling relationships, her relationship with her mother and stepfather, and her career. The novel spans several years, from Payton's last year in high school to when she marries and has a family of her own. A constant thread throughout Payton's life is her on-again off-again relationship with her stepfather's son, Chip, who enters her life when she is a teenager. Payton is more than a mere wheelchair-user: she is an active, ambitious person with a busy social life, boyfriends, and a supportive family. Payton defies the unfortunate stereotype of the friendless, pathetic, asexual person with a disability.

Payton's round personality and full life are the most positive aspects of this novel. Punctuation and capitalization errors occur in every paragraph. Apostrophes remain woefully underused. Run-on sentences run rampant. Sloppy editing is readily apparent as verb tenses fail to agree with the subjects of sentences. For example, "the Civil War era" becomes "the Civil War Error," and Iacofano writes, "he lie in bed next to her," instead of "he lay in bed next to her."

Chapters end abruptly and awkwardly, with many scenes lacking closure. Months or years pass without warning. Readers are often left confused as characters change jobs or roommates based on one snippet of dialogue, and they are left to orient themselves as Iacofano flings the characters around without adequately establishing the action. The author also brings up interesting issues, such as partner abuse and a relationship between teacher and student, only to resolve the dilemmas in trite ways. Characterizations are inconsistent. For example, when Payton strikes her younger sister, the sister says she deserved to be struck; later, Payton condemns the same sister's boyfriend for striking the girl. Characters become very angry over some matters, only to hold no grudges at later junctures. These personality switches make the characters seem immature, and this immaturity is the only consistent trait.

The Ordinary Girl needs an extraordinary amount of editing before it is ready for a general readership.

JILL ALLEN (July 12, 2010)

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