



The Other Side of 30

R.Y. Swint

Booklocker

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R. Y. Swint provides nuanced, empathetic analysis of human nature through the richly-textured characters in her debut novel, *The Other Side of 30*.^{*} Like the protagonist, the author is a soldier in the US Army.

Lonely and bored, Sebrina Cooper works in Atlanta, Georgia, processing new recruits. Her life takes a turn when her charismatic ex-boyfriend Curtis, a Marine recruiter, enters her office. Their attraction reignites, and thus begins, a passionate relationship. It doesn't matter that Curtis is engaged during their first encounter, or even that he goes through with the marriage. The situation becomes even more complicated when Sebrina finds herself acquainted with Andra-Lyn, Curtis' wife. Andra-Lyn begins to look to Sebrina as a confidante and friend, with whom she can share stories of relationship woes and drinks. Curtis and Andra-Lyn each are unaware that Sebrina knows the other one. In no time, Sebrina goes from an unfulfilled twenty-nine-year-old to a woman on the other side of thirty juggling secrets.

Swint's brilliant narrative makes readers sympathize with Sebrina, Curtis, and Andra-Lyn although they all have unappealing traits. The protagonist, on one hand, is a callous, immature homewrecker who mentally insults Andra-Lyn while pretending to be her friend. Yet readers also see Sebrina's anguish as she cries out to God, and they find themselves agreeing with her when she says her need for her lover is impossible to control. Thus, readers see Sebrina suffering because of her emotions, and this suffering evokes compassion. Curtis, at his worst, is a bully with a magnetic personality who thinks he can get whatever he wants. Swint masterfully depicts his lovemaking prowess and powers of persuasion so that readers get caught up in his magic, as Sebrina does, and forgive his previous slights. Andra-Lyn, for her part, is an annoyingly oblivious dupe, far too solicitous to Sebrina. Seen in an alternative light, Andra-Lyn is pitiable as readers see her lavish goodwill on the protagonist and feel her pain as she recounts her marital troubles. The author presents a marvelously multi-faceted portrayal of adultery, showing how no one is innocent and how everyone is negatively affected.

In this emotionally-charged novel, the author further ratchets up the poignancy by deftly interweaving threads about signs from God, longing for children, and the pain associated with fair-weather friendships. For the uninitiated, *The Other Side of 30*^{*} offers a fascinating look into the bureaucracy and stresses of recruiting potential soldiers. The unaware will appreciate all the work that goes on behind the scenes in order for the army to set up an informational table at a high school. Swint expertly balances military specificity with the right amount of explanatory context to keep civilian readers engaged.

The Other Side of 30^{*} is recommended for readers who desire psychologically complex romances.

JILL ALLEN (July 8, 2011)

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