ForeWord Reviews

GENERAL

The View from Here
Deborah McKinlay
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Frances is dying. She knows it, her daughter knows it, her husband knows it, and her husband's mistress knows it. Frances is fairly peaceful with the prospect, though she aches for her daughter, Chloe, and all the time together they'll miss.

The certainty of death is part of what drives Frances to reflect and record the part she played in another family's tragedy a lifetime ago in Mexico, where she was known as Frankie. Back then she was the beach-house guest of a wealthy family, the patriarch of which took a liking to her, a liking Frankie mistook for love. She learned the hard way that she was simply a part of his habit, and the morbid consequences of her emotional reaction haunt her older self as she nears the end of her life.

Frances makes for a good narrator; she is honest, devoted, and able to weigh the future of her loved ones against her own sense of rage at her husband's infidelity. As a young woman she is infinitely recognizable. Most readers are familiar with that particular brand of innocence, the kind that maintains a willful blindness to both the devastating effects of one's actions and to the disappointing possibility that one may make no mark at all amongst people more powerful.

Deborah McKinlay, English author of several nonfiction books, keeps the past and present acutely balanced with a deft, precise narrative that makes readers both eager to know the end and unwilling to speed through such succulent prose. Her use of character is brilliant. The wealthy family and their fashionable friends manage to retain their defining details—BeeBee's wry, dry wit and Richard's stiff attempts at joviality—while blending into one another in a sweeping portrayal of privilege. Readers will like both the youthful and more mature Frances, and will likely admire her strength, endurance, and dignity. One might find oneself wishing for a miracle cure even while one laps up McKinlay's descriptions of the end of a marriage and the end of a life. When Frances reveals her crime, it's impossible to react with a sense of extreme judgment.

A book of sweet, studied passion, *The View From Here* is both an escape into an ocean-side tale of splendid fun and a deep dive into the moral questions that can define lives and deaths.

Andi Diehn