Clarion Review

Historical

Tides of Grace: Book 1 in the Grace Sextet
Weldon B. Durham
FriesenPress
978-1-77097-218-6
Five Stars (out of Five)

Set in 1907, Weldon B. Durham's novel *Tides of Grace* is a captivating beginning to his planned series featuring protagonist Grace Lampley.

For seventeen-year-old Grace, accommodating the needs of her manic-depressive mother and caring for her younger brother each day adds to the pressure of her senior year of high school and worries about her unsettled future. But Grace is dependable and caring, and chooses to focus on the comfort and happiness of those around her even as she buries the emotional trauma of a devastating family tragedy that continues to haunt her.

Durham writes Grace's character with great depth and compassion, and she emerges as a complex and conflicted heroine. Emotionally wounded at a young age, she is aware of a darker side to her personality which surfaces during difficult times: "That part of herself was separated from her, but it went wherever she went, saw what she saw, heard what she heard … when longing or agonizing memories or fears settled over her, she sensed the eye's alertness." As Grace is faced with one challenging situation after another, this "dark angel" influences her decisions and leads her to make choices that ultimately threaten her own potential happiness.

Durham's writing style is appealing and the story unfolds at a steady, comfortable pace. Dialogue is consistently natural and character development is flawless; all of the characters are explored thoroughly, from Grace and her family to her friends and acquaintances. For instance, Grace's mother clearly suffers from a mood disorder, and readers will get to know her well enough to empathize with her frustration and inability to cope. Those moments in which she finds the strength she needs to be there for her children, however brief, are deeply moving. Durham has a remarkable talent for bringing each of his characters to life, and readers will be enthralled with all of their stories.

The author capably captures the atmosphere of St. Louis in the early twentieth century,

setting scenes with allusions to the escalating suffragette movement, the ongoing racial discord, and even the fashions and attitudes of the time. The realistic setting and authentic narrative adds to the credibility of the story, providing Grace's tale the solid background it deserves.

With the exception of the inconsistent spelling of one character's name, the text is well edited and competently structured. Events flow naturally and tension builds at a satisfying pace. Grace's story is absorbing and poignant, and the novel's conclusion will leave readers anxious to discover where her journey will take her next.

Durham's informative blog for the series states that he has the next two books drafted. This first installment offers memorable characters and a thoroughly engrossing story line, and readers will undoubtedly become engaged with the characters and invested in learning their fates. *Tides of Grace* is an exceptional achievement, and those who make the wise decision to open the book will surely be eager to read the rest of the series by the time they close it. Very highly recommended.

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