Clarion Review

General

Tinted Windows
Diane Gooden
AuthorHouse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

This saga, set against the backdrop of the twentieth century and the present day, follows three generations of the Johnston and Hampton families as they pursue lives of wealth and privilege. The book opens in the present with Amanda, the daughter of Franklin Johnston, and her sexual encounters. Given this beginning, the story seems more like erotica than a romance novel. The chapters that follow focus on Madelyn, who will turn out to be Amanda's mother. Frank, one of the book's two primary characters, does not appear until page fifty-four and the other, Gunther Hampton, appears even later. The inclusion of family trees might have helped to clarify the relationships between the characters and anchor the reader more effectively.

The story gathers interest when historical events come into play, either as a backdrop or as catalysts for plot turns. Frank begins as a crop worker, but makes money, displaying the intuition needed to overcome setbacks, such as the stock market crash of 1929. Gunther, who comes from a wealthy family, does not live the life of ease that is expected of a man with money: His wife is ill, his daughter is out of control, and he experiences unrequited love for a woman he cannot have.

The challenge for the reader is to understand how the various story elements fit together and to follow the many leaps through time. For example, the story about the effects of the 1929 stock market crash on Frank and other characters is followed by a chapter that begins in 1909. Chapter twenty begins with the dateline, "February 20, 1963; South Los Angeles, CA," but the setting later shifts to "March 1984, South Central, Los Angeles, CA" and "May, 1984, Lomita, Los Angeles, CA." These descriptors help orient the reader to the current setting, but there's too much need for these explanations.

Diane Gooden's writing is straightforward and direct, and she uses a good balance of description and dialogue. There are some places where the work might be condensed, as it is

very long. Another round of editing would also have been helpful. There are too many typos and inaccurate phrases: for example, “mute point” and “title wave.” A good copy editor could address such issues.

Overall, however, there is plenty of plot and action. Despite their competitive natures, Frank and Gunther understand and respect each other. They race expensive cars on their own track, are rooted in the land they own, and come to terms with each other, accepting that they are friends even after a period of estrangement. Despite its flaws, this novel moves at a fast pace and will keep the reader entertained.

Aline Soules