



Undrawn

Conchie Fernandez

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In *Undrawn*, the imminent death of his tyrannical father Brandon forces frail, thirty-six-year-old painter Kyle to return to his boyhood home after a self-imposed exile. While there, the past catches up to the son, and he finds himself facing old family rifts, former girlfriends, crimes of passion, and, most of all, the overwhelming urge to be loved and accepted. Conchie Fernandez's debut novel shifts between the past and present as Kyle seeks absolution in a world where many factors are unknown.

The protagonist's struggles are witnessed by his sneering brother Stuart, who has secrets of his own, his affectionate brother Troy, and his selfless mother, Norma, who possesses more concern about Kyle's diabetes than about her own emotional well-being in the wake of Brandon's death. Also populating the story are Kyle's contacts in the art world, as well as past and present lovers, all with distinct traits.

As a former newspaper editor and present-day creative writing teacher, Fernandez eloquently captures the subtleties of human relationships. Readers clearly see the protagonist hurting because of his father's control, even as he holds out hope that Brandon will someday acknowledge his art.

Art isn't the only thing about Kyle that Brandon fails to accept; he does not believe that his son is truly ill. To hear Brandon accuse Kyle, a diabetic, of trying to manipulate his father's emotions by having an attack is truly horrifying. When juxtaposed against Norma and Troy's caring attitude toward the sickly Kyle, Brandon's indifference becomes all the more cruel. Kyle and Troy behave like real brothers. Beneath their profanity-laced dialogue brims love and protectiveness. In a novel loaded with *machismo*, it is refreshing to see Troy and Kyle hug, both in the past and the present.

Undrawn refreshes the trope of the tortured artist. Readers see how Kyle is haunted by his past while he suffers from occasional diabetic attacks. Kyle's physical and mental suffering is poignantly rendered, although occasionally his diabetic attacks seem like convenient plot devices. Fernandez masterfully immerses readers in the world of Kyle's canvas, so that they paint right along with the artist. The book becomes confusing toward the end as the past and present become less distinctive, and the narrative point of view shifts between third person and first person. On the whole, though, *Undrawn* is a well-realized portrait of conflict and forgiveness.

JILL ALLEN (April 27, 2011)

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