

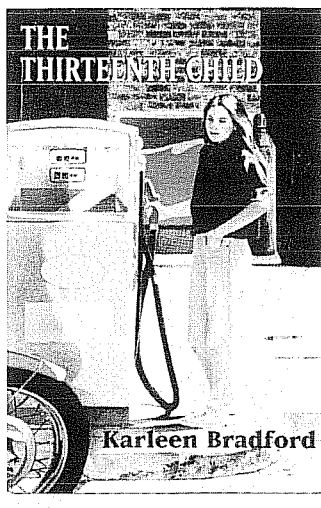
harassment as well. The book is good on these facts, but weak in terms of developing a character who has much integrity: Maya acts mostly by reacting, and her goals of a job and a boyfriend show her to be not all that different from other girls. Her search for a spot away from home is hampered by her overly protective parents, but her choices and actions are unexceptional. Without the wheelchair, she could be any fictional female dreaming of the perfect boy. The circumstances regarding sexual harassment on the job are informative, but the book is a light read, perhaps just what Degrossi watchers would like.

The sisters in Norah McClintock's *The Stepfather Game* are different because of their unusual family; the title refers to their mother's search for a man who will become a stepfather to this various group of girls. Too many issues are at work in this story: McClintock tackles racism, rebellion, anorexia, and over-achievement, all the while making sure each girl and the mother find a male companion by the end of the book. Juggling so many characters and situations makes too many demands on the reader, and the ending is rather pat. The girls in this book are also rather passive protagonists. Rather than stepping boldly away into independence, they tend to react to situations, and seem lonely and detached. There's not enough home in them to hold them together, and their main drive to get away is realized through a male.

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ESCAPE INTO DANGEROUS WATERS

Thirteenth child. Karleen Bradford. HarperCollins, 1994. 224 pp, \$17.00, \$10.00 cloth, paper. ISBN 0-00-224367-9; ISBN 0-00-647943-X.



Lying at the heart of this story is the question: "Is your life a trap to be escaped or a problem to be solved?" It opens with an array of characters all trying to escape. Kate, the protagonist, indulges in romantic fantasies; Steve, her father, drinks heavily and beats his wife to dull his sense of guilt; and her mother retreats into sloth and T.V. Her friend, Barney, desperately tries to defy his father's unrealistic demands, and Mike, the mysterious new youth in town, has run away from home.

We see the growth in Kate's understanding of her situation through the changes in her fantasies and writings. Instead of creating highly artificial scenarios, she begins to write "almost unconsciously," and unknowingly creates a de-

scription of Mike. The unconscious is suggested by water in a dream she has while gazing into the fish tank Mike has brought her:

She reached out her hand to her partner. Together, they walked into the foaming surf. The caressing water reached her knees, her thighs. A splash of spray suddenly drenched her and she cried out, but in delight.

"We swim now," the stranger said.

She let her body sink into the waves, lowered her masked face to the surface, and took her first look at the world below.... (77)

This erotic reverie delicately links her emerging sexuality with deeper self-knowledge.

Peril, as well as delight, however, lies in that "world below." Like the shark at the bottom of the fish tank, harmful anger seems to simmer within men. Kate uses the word "dangerous" in her spontaneous description of Mike. Even before the events that triggered Steve's present abusive behaviour, Kate sensed in him a potential for violence. And the gentle-seeming Barney ultimately reveals himself as capable of murderous rage. Bradford is touching on a most disquieting aspect of the lives of girls and women—the dangerousness, as well as the attractiveness, of men. While sinking into the unconscious can provide insights into how to deal with this reality, it cannot offer escape. Nor can any of the other avenues explored by the people in this story. The one character who refuses to face his demons is destroyed; the others move ahead. We can justifiably argue that Bradford herself avoids coming to grips with the threats that hang over girls and women, when we learn that a murdered girl was witness to a crime, rather than the victim of assault. But she must maintain a balance between depicting the truths of life and encouraging hope.

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