

## A Little Family Drama Never Hurt Anyone

REVIEW BY DD TAYLOR-GARCIA

It is not often that I read novels or stories about queer people who actually live and interact with their birth families on a daily basis. *Faults*, set in Santa Monica, California in the winter of 1993-94, seems rather unique in this way.

The story revolves around Toni Dorado, who is having a mid-life crisis of sorts. The story

### Faults Terri de la Pena PUBLISHER

opens as she heads south via train, running away from a cabin in the woods of the Pacific Northwest and a lover who was a way out. Waiting

for Toni in Santa Monica are her younger sister, Sylvia, her mother, Adela, her niece, Gabi, and Pat Ramos, her ex-lover.

Things are especially shaky with Pat. When Toni left Santa Monica, she did so with Amanda, a white woman she met at a library science conference. That Toni knows now that it was a mistake doesn't necessarily mean that Pat is willing to forgive all.

As if things weren't complicated enough in

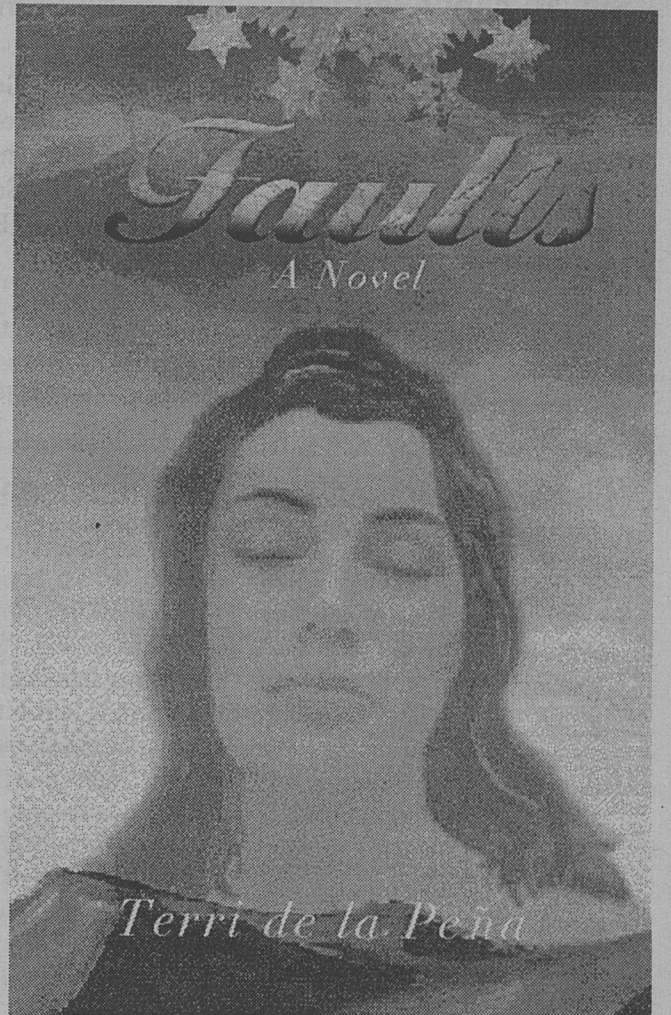
the arena of love, Toni has another family problem. Her only sister, homophobic and insecure Sylvia, has moved in next door with her man and batterer, Zalo.

As you may have guessed, Toni has to face a lot of drama this winter. She finds herself aching with love and desire for Pat, who is keeping her distance. When Sylvia reveals that she is pregnant, Zalo's violence escalates and endangers the whole family.

The novel manages to deal with the messy web of familial relationships and drama in a realistic way. I was also impressed that the story, while narrated by five different women, avoided pretentious distance, disjointedness and misplaced irony. Each character narrates her story personally and with a good measure of sincerity. That is hard to find in fiction lately.

De la Pena's use of Spanglish in some of the dialogue is a nice touch, though some readers may find a Spanish-English dictionary useful.

If you are looking for a good Valentine's Day read, pick this up. It has a lot to say about true love. ▼



## And You Thought Your Life Was a Soap Opera

REVIEW BY PAUL OLSEN

Ethan and his lover Doug consider buying a house and moving in together. Etienne sends a friend to retrieve the drugs he's hidden in Ethan's apartment. Doug can't keep a hard on, Lucy has hairballs, and the office holiday party is a disaster.

No, this is not a conversation overheard during happy hour at Pearl's. Nor is it an all-gay episode of General Hospital. Rather, these woes are just some of the daily trials and tribulations that comic strip artist and storyteller Eric Orner hilariously addresses in his new book *Ethan: Exposed*.

The book's protagonist is Ethan Green, a gay man "doing his best to cope with life, lovers, pets, employers, and love handles." In the book, Orner introduces readers to Ethan's lesbian neighbor, Charlotte, his best friend, Bucky, his HIV-positive lover, Doug, his carefree cat, Lucy, and Ethan's "glamorous super-diva aunties," the Hat Sisters.

### Ethan: Exposed Eric Orner St. Martin's Griffin

(Yes, P-Town fans, those Hat Sisters).

*Ethan: Exposed* is a compilation of Orner's regular comic strip "The Mostly Unfabulous Social Life of Ethan Green." In this collection of works, Orner cleverly – and not inaccurately – deals with office politics, ex-lovers, monogamy, holiday visits home, dog walking etiquette, and gay fashion.

Along with any Alison Bechdel *Dykes to Watch Out For* cartoon compilation, *Ethan: Exposed* is a great and mandatory addition to any gay and lesbian library. ▼

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