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SOCIETY'S CHILD

My Autobiography

Author: Ian, Janis

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The sad life and hard times of the queen of mopey folk.

Fifteen-year-old Ian became a cause cl'bre in the 1960s as the composer and performer of "Society's Child," a folk-pop song that daringly addressed an interracial romance between teenagers. In calm, lucid prose, she charts the bumpy path of her life and career since then as an embattled lesbian singer-songwriter with, apparently, worse luck than the Chicago Cubs. Precociously intelligent, Ian felt alienated from her peers, and this early unhappiness seems to have colored many of her subsequent experiences. As she struggled to advance her career in an often cruel and superficial industry, she was repeatedly cheated and mismanaged, never quite breaking through to superstardom despite such hits as the 1975 wallflower anthem "At Seventeen." In her account, the author sees herself as a perpetual victim: molested by the family dentist as a child, drugged by a stranger on the streets of New York, sexually manipulated by her therapist and various girlfriends, cheated by business managers, persecuted by the IRS, beaten and threatened with death by a psychotic husband. Serious health problems also repeatedly sidelined Ian, including an incapacitating bout of chronic fatigue syndrome. All of which would suggest she is an epic downer to hang out with. As a narrator, though, she proves excellent company, providing fascinating insights into the craft of songwriting and amusing anecdotes about carousing with the likes of Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. The personal material is equally gripping, in a soap-operatic way, rife with betrayals, sexual intrigue, danger and madness. As evidenced by many of her lyrics (and second career writing science-fiction stories), Ian is a natural prose stylist with a real knack for pacing and the telling detail. What might have been a dreary catalog of woe is instead a juicily entertaining look at an unusual life in show business.

Downbeat yet oddly rollicking and compulsively readable.