

A Faithful Son

Michael Scott Garvin

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A Faithful Son is a visceral experience, realistic and vibrant, wrought with the same craftsmanship as a painting resembling a photograph, or a window into another time and place. Michael Scott Garvin has populated his pages with vivid scenes filled with all the colors and sensations of nature, grounding narrator Zach's story in the inevitable passage of time in a way that is particularly rural, attuned to the slow, even pace of life's wear upon the body and the soul.

The titular character is not only assured of the existence of a distant, disinterested God, but in his actions he embodies faith: while navigating the peculiar hazards and pleasures small-town living presents to a closeted young gay man, loyalty to his mother remains a constant, central, and motivating theme throughout the text.

In Garvin's Durango, Colorado, Baptist families share the richness of their beliefs, making community and finding joy in their mutual prosperity. Here, and throughout the book, there are no heroes, saints, nor villains to be found—in the tale's matter-of-fact tone there is a stolid and sincere assertion that each person has a history and complexity.

"The twisted boughs of the massive, gnarly pecan sprawled against a charcoal sky in defiance of another brutal winter," Garvin writes, crafting a metaphor to accompany his character at the bedside of a dying loved one. The evolution of Zach's observant, stoic, and deeply sensitive personality unfolds alongside the shifting economic conditions drawing prosperity increasingly to America's cities. By the use of these motifs, Garvin reveals Zach's faith as the old-fashioned, patient sort, persevering through dark times and cherishing life's pleasures with surrender to the certainty of both. It is also the kind of faith placed in a person by their family and community, entrusting them with responsibility and assuring the resiliency to live up to shared hopes and expectations.

Fitting easily on a shelf next to books by Jim Grimsley or Annie Proulx, *A Faithful Son* reveals Zach's sensuality in an understated, private way: "The ruggedly handsome cowboys primped more for a night out than the Sisters of the First Assembly of God working their glorious bouffants before a Sunday service," he observes, finding his footing in the gay mecca of West Hollywood.

Garvin avoids easy resolutions, caricatures, and shocking twists in the service of a strong story populated by believable characters. *A Faithful Son* is a highly recommended, enjoyable read for lovers of quality literature that needs no flash or hype to leave an impression.

PATTY COMEAU (June 9, 2016)

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