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Clarion Review

A Very Emotional Road

Aleta Asta Helton
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The death of a mate is among the most grievous losses one can endure; Aleta Asta Helton turned to poetry for help in surviving the deep sorrow caused by the death of her husband and soul mate, Bob, after a long and painful battle with cancer.

Rather than succumbing to her despair, Helton decided to write her feelings in a form she loved, and in that, she has followed a well-established precedent: throughout history, poetry has been a vessel for the outpouring of the most intimate thoughts and feelings. For some, turning to poetry in a time of trouble is almost instinctual. When this is the case, the works created are, for the writer, sacred space and not to be defiled by the words of a critic—what is written may be too raw, with emotion as dense as that which possesses an animal grieving the loss of mate or master.

Under such circumstances, the request by Helton to her publisher to leave her works, “verbatim, without editorial input,” is understandable; the poems reveal raw wounds and a mind clouded by pain. “How will I survive now that you are gone?” and, “What is my purpose in life, without you?” she asks again and again as the grinding-wheel of grief runs over and over her heart.

And yet, the poet is not without hope; she believes that somewhere beyond death there is reunion, and this is the hope that she offers readers. Progressing through the well-known stages of grief over a nine-month period of time beginning just before her husband’s death, she turns to her faith in God and expresses her gratitude for having had at least a short time with the man she calls “the love of her life.”

Those who have walked the path of grief will recognize its landmarks, those who are walking it as they read will feel themselves understood, and those who have refused to grieve in the past may find themselves provoked to shed healing tears.

Helton’s poems are not sophisticated, but they are courageous. Writing through one’s grief is an act of courage, perhaps even an act of defiance, as the writer stands for all that was loved, and, in the writing of it, saves it. It is suggested that she revisit her desire to leave her poems untouched by editors; though Helton has done a service in offering her work to others who may be grieving, the mastery of the craft of poetry requires more than just honest release of emotion. Careful editing and consulting with those more experienced in the crafting of poems would eliminate distracting errors in punctuation, word usage, and difficulties with rhythm, form, and rhyme.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May 18, 2010)

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