ForeWord Reviews

POETRY

American Rhapsody
Carole Stone
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"There's a hole in my heart, / a place where the dead hide / in their secret clubhouse," writes veteran poet Carole Stone in the poem "Root," from her latest collection, *American Rhapsody*. The hole, made by the death of Stone's parents when she was four, acts as the primary catalyst for this poignant and lyrical volume. Stone tenderly fabricates narratives about her parents by cobbling together stories, fading photographs, and inherited objects from their lives. In "Home Coming," she etches a portrait of her father according to things remembered: "My father is / a roller coaster, a grey fedora, / cut-glass decanters with silver tags / engraved: Scotch Gin Rye." She fleshes out a dapper, stoic image of him, his "face forever handsome and tan," while matter-of-factly acknowledging his illicit mob dealings in the sestina "A Daughter Returns to Her Habana Fantasy." Stone's succinct language makes her a very approachable poet.

American Rhapsody is a very fitting title for this episodic collection, wrought with a kaleidoscope of feelings about loss, yearning, and love. Stone combines the historical references of Warren Harding, Winston Churchill, and Josephine Baker with mentions of Enron, the "*Nightly Business Report*," and Oprah, all while infusing her work with a Gershwinian rhythm and musicality. Jazz and Prohibition references abound, contextualizing the work beautifully.

Stone taps into her unencumbered desire to understand her past in "Home: Ceremonies": "What she wants is to wade knee-deep / in tenderness, to swim in that river, / her dearest ones holding her." She is forever in mourning over what might have been; craving embraces she longs to receive. As an experienced writer, Stone does not shy away from placing her heart on the page as a way of coming to terms with a history she recognizes she may never understand. It is through this honesty that Stone wins over her readers.

In the collection's final poem, "Edward Hopper: Outside the Frame," Stone imagines her family as part of the artist's paintings "The Bootleggers" and "Tables for Ladies." It's as if only by placing them within the confines of these frames will the poet finally be able to lay her family to rest. But such a clean ending would not resonate as true, and so in the last vignette Stone artfully compares Hopper's wife, who is "by herself again, / wherever her husband set up

his easel, “with her dead mother, bare shouldered, “waiting up for my father.” This perpetual longing parallels Stone’s own obsessive need to understand her past, an acknowledgement that, coupled with her incredible vulnerability, makes this collection rich and endearing.

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