



Borrowed Dress

Cathy Colman

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Perhaps a borrowed dress could free a person “to become what I loved, fly // into the stunned landscape where clouds unfold their longings to be lakes and lakes hold clouds in their mouths / as briefly as smoke.”

This first collection of poems by the winner of the Felix Pollak Prize in Poetry tries on abstract aspects such as nothingness, passion, and death while candidly gazing into life’s mirror with a twist of clever humor. Colman’s poems have previously appeared in numerous publications, such as the Colorado Review, Spoon River Poetry Review, and Quarterly West. This is her third poetry prize award.

It seems as if this poet is talking to the reader personally, but with an accent. The accent is her subtle yet charming veil of self that filters common images in such a way as to create a poignant view of ordinary moments. Each poem evokes meaningful nuances that help the reader shed old skins to see the world anew or “to live with no past tense.” Her metaphors and rhythmic lyrics are crisp and illuminating. For example, in “Impermanence in Orange” Colman paints the air as an “oriental garden lacquered with moonlight and shadow like midnight on a cruise ship.”

This collection is refreshingly free from esoteric meanderings, yet stirs up deep universal truths. Her style is Zen-like in its simple clarity and “ah-ha” moments. Her creative pattern of images—“Mistress” is described as one “who balances pieces of camouflage on her lips and calls it cake”—flow throughout all these poems, bringing a cohesiveness to her work that portrays a strong voice with much richness to offer.

Colman is an obvious talent and a delight to read. Her poetry will be popular, as it touches on subjects that all people ponder and gives wise imagery to the unnamed loads they carry. This is truly a poet to look for on the shelves and share as a perfect example of how refined poetry communicates and expands the soul.

AIMÉ MERIZON (January / February 2002)

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