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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★☆ POETRY

Heart of the Prisoner

Brad Moschetti
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In the film, *The Shawshank Redemption*, the narrator recalls his first night in prison, saying, “When they put you in that cell, and those bars slam home, that’s when you know it’s for real. A whole life blown away in the blink of an eye. Nothing left but all the time in the world to think about it.” For Brad Moschetti, who was sentenced to twelve years, prison held the potential to break him, to crush his spirit. But miraculously, it didn’t. Among the many things Moschetti discovered about himself while there was his voice as a poet. *Heart of the Prisoner* is a collection of surprisingly uplifting poems written from behind bars.

The poetry in this volume covers a gamut of emotions and themes. When the mood strikes Moschetti, his poems have a whimsy similar to that of Shel Silverstein. In “The Invisible Postman,” he views getting nothing in the mail the same way that one experiences getting a letter: “So, I opened this nothing real, real wide / To find there was even less inside / The penmanship was neat and clean / So clean, in fact, it couldn’t be seen.” In “Turkey,” Moschetti describes how the prison menu offered turkey so much that the very idea of the dish makes him ill: “Just the thought of turkey inside / Upon the toilet seat I’d ride.”

When Moschetti gets serious, he produces some of this collection’s most moving poems on faith and salvation. “All Along” opens almost like a prayer: “I pray that God comes near to me / To work His mighty plans / He’s everywhere, I just can’t see / Eyes being that of man’s.”

Moschetti’s writing is also strong when he writes about love. In poems like “Between the Lines,” he tenderly reminisces about the times he spent as a child with his mother and father. In other works, such as “Amy Smiles” and “My Perfect Son,” Moschetti writes about how important his children are in his life. But it’s the poems about the woman that he longs to see again, like “Gently,” that really stand out. “Gently she comes / The love that we share / Has me reeling / A glorious feeling,” he writes.

While a few of the love poems may sound similar to others in the book and sometimes the tropes are a bit clichéd, Moschetti’s earnestness makes them feel fresh enough that it’s forgivable.

This volume will be enjoyed by anyone who likes uplifting poems, but to look at *Heart of the Prisoner* as only a collection of poems would be an oversight. Moschetti’s book tells the story of a man’s journey through one of life’s darkest experiences and how holding on to his love, faith, and hope enabled him to come out on the other side as a stronger and better person.
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