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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Ice within the Soul

Shawn Maureen McKelvie
CreateSpace (Apr 25, 2012)
Softcover $15.00 (256pp)
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Predators lurking in the fields and back alleys of childhood, along with the injustices of maturing in an imperfect world, may not rank high on most readers' preferred entertainment list. But the social contribution of works such as Shawn Maureen McKelvie's *Ice within the Soul*remains invaluable. Loosely based on the author's experiences, this memoir-style novel establishes the believable illusion of autobiography.

Written from the viewpoint of Moe Bender, a sensitive girl, and later, an outspoken woman, this stirring first-person account presents both major events and also minor incidents in a confidential story. The book encompasses everything from life-changing tragedy to mundane activity, and while this odd mixture of trauma and triviality is realistic, in the guise of fiction the lack of definition may cause the reader to question the focus of the plot.

McKelvie incorporates scary elements such as the molestation and murder of a playmate by a neighborhood stalker into a work that teeters on an ominous ledge, veering into the supernatural when the child's ghost briefly appears later. Of the stalker, she writes: "I'd manage to catch a glimpse of him riding by our house every few months. Just as I peered out the window, his dark evil eyes met mine and he smiled."

Detailed descriptions of Moe's time in nursing school and her presentations of depressing medical histories bog down the plot: "My new patient had cellulitis from injecting heroin into her arms, legs, toes, or anywhere there was a vein. Drug addicts would frequently reuse and even share their needles and develop an infection—often a serious one." In this case, the patient she refers to plays no significant role in the book. A result of hasty production and insufficient editing, this excursion down an irrelevant side road and others like it weaken the book—especially its portentous mood, which could have been the novel's strongest attribute—and soften its storytelling impact.

In contrast, the packaging is excellent, with its attention-grabbing cover and back cover blurb. McKelvie describes her literary debut as a journey and a desire to explore family issues, not a horror novel. *Ice within the Soul* is intended to be the first in a series.

Fans of Joyce Carol Oates will find this intriguing story suggestive of an experimental twist on Oates's writing. Its lack of classification is perhaps the book's selling point for readers who enjoy the merging of multiple literary boundaries.

JULIA ANN CHARPENTIER (September 24, 2012)

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