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Little Boy Blue: A Memoir in Verse

Gray Jacobik
University Press of New England (February 2011)
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In her eighth book, poet Gray Jacobik plunges readers deep inside the story of a mother looking back on her life with her first-born, a son born when she was still a teen. Written as one poem in twenty-three separate movements, *Little Boy Blue: A Memoir in Verse* confronts Jacobik's story with brutal honesty and the underlying message that, while wrongs cannot be undone, they can be confessed to bring about healing.

The poem begins with straightforward acknowledgement that the narrator tried to rid herself of her pregnancy, taking thirty quinine pills that left her in a coma for days. She says: "Roe vs. Wade hadn't/happened or you'd not have been born." From this moment on, readers come to understand that this is a very particular memoir in that it is addressed to "you," her son who is born bipolar and with ADHD.

Throughout the poem, Jacobik takes readers from the moment of conception ("my doing—the bed I'd made…/Not a bed. The front seat of a 1956 Chevrolet Sedan.") to the son's often difficult adult years and eventual estrangement from his mother ("Oh wary malcontent, recluse at ease when/your world is small enough to ignore, be safe./May you have, near at hand, whatever you need."). The poet never holds back from revealing every particle of the truth, no matter how bad—or *human*— it looks. Likewise, this truth-telling also lets Jacobik venture into the sentimental at times, a necessary and believable counterbalance for everything weighty in the poem.

In addition to taking on such difficult and intimate subject matter, Jacobik shows her skill at throwing readers right inside a moment, sudden as a scrap of memory appearing in one's mind. Moreover, the sheer variety of emotions explored and the approaches that Jacobik takes (from poems written like reportage to stream-of-consciousness poems that eschew punctuation) keep the tension high and easily hold readers' attention throughout the book-length poem.

Part of LaurelBooks, CavanKerry's Literature of Illness imprint, *Little Boy Blue* is a stunning collection that reaches far beyond the typical audience of poetry lovers. Perfect for public libraries, hospital libraries, and community centers, *Little Boy Blue* could change lives by letting people know that someone else has walked in such difficult shoes.

JENNIFER FANDEL (May 12, 2011)

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