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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Morphed Nightmare

Rob Joplin
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Imagine an eighteen-year-old honor student from an upper-class family who lives a life of privilege and opportunity. Now imagine that this same young man breaks the law and is suddenly transplanted into the hard and unforgiving world of a federal jail. This is the terrifying reality for Rob Joplin's protagonist, Matt Gore. "I sit in my cell and stare at the white walls colored in a pale shade of death," he says "…eighteen years old and facing up to three years in the big house after committing my first and only crime. I think about my family—my mom, my dad, and my girlfriend (or should I say my ex-girlfriend); I think about how I have hurt them, caused them pain, disappointed them and myself, and let everyone down."

The fact that Joplin spent some time in jail adds authenticity to this short work. At forty-eight pages, Morphed Nightmare falls into the category of a novelette rather than a novel or even a novella. Joplin uses his protagonist Matt to narrate the first thirteen pages; this internal monolog features descriptive imagery, bravado, and self-deprecating humor. The reader is allowed inside the mind of an intelligent, cocky teenager at conflict not only with the sadism of the penal system, but also the masochism that exists within his soul. The jail scene contains decent supporting characters—like Thomas, who is "forty-five and has been in and out of state and federal prison all his life." Matt explains, "He had been in my position before: young, in prison, sick of the world, and looking for an excuse to throw haymakers."

The book suffers from a lack of proper editing, and after the first thirteen pages, the writing becomes awkward. Joplin switches to a third-person narrative to describe what is happening to Matt's friend, Dan Malone. While this section provides the reader with more information about Matt, the transition is choppy. For the next six pages, readers actually learn more about Dan. In three more sections, Joplin alternates between Matt and Dan's lives. These writing infractions are forgivable, but Joplin loses the reader's attention when he returns to Matt's story and continues in the third person.

Writing Morphed Nightmare was probably therapeutic for Rob Joplin, allowing him to exorcise some demons by sharing his experiences with the world. One cannot refute that he provides the reader with an insider's perspective of jail or prison that is rarely viewed by the average person, but it doesn't excuse him for not properly editing his work.
LEE GOODEN (June 28, 2010)

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