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CLARION REVIEW ★★★★★ GENERAL FICTION

My Former Self

C. T. Musca
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C. T. Musca has meticulously polished her prose in telling Daverin's fascinating story of how "life has a way of changing things."

Thirty-six years old and single, dental-office receptionist Tonya Daverin reflects on how she has changed from a fun-loving fifteen-year-old in 1989 rural Ontario to a reclusive, antisocial woman of 2010 in Ottawa. At the conclusion of her reflections, she reveals not one but two surprising personal tragedies that presumably led her to writing the inscription on the first page of the book: "As hard as I try, I just can't forget. -2003." From the outset, adult readers and mature young adults will find C. T. Musca's extraordinary novel of Daverin's coming of age (and well beyond) to be a captivating read.

The introspective first chapter, which takes place in the fall of 2010, introduces Daverin as a thirty-six-year-old receptionist in an Ottawa dental office as she laments the efforts of her landlady and coworkers to set her up on dates. Chapter two flashes back to the summer of 1989 to depict Daverin "daydreaming again" about her future. Thus, Musca reveals early an artful, well-paced structure of "now" and "then" for showing how the standoffish adult becomes a very different individual from that of her teenage fantasies.

In telling Daverin's fascinating story of how "life has a way of changing things," Musca has meticulously polished her prose. The book, with its short, insightful chapters about Daverin and those around her—mother, father, brother, younger sister, and two best girlfriends—over the twenty-one-year period of her recollections, can be easily read and enjoyed in one or two sittings. Nostalgic memories of high-school dances, teenage crushes, and surreptitious alcohol binges intermingle with references to the music (of Van Halen, for example) and culture of 1989.

The descriptions of the characters' lives in their earlier settings provide a solid background that accentuates the changes in their current lives. This is especially true in Daverin's case; stories emerge of her sister's marriage and divorce, the death of her mother, and the drifting apart of former friends. "Now I barely see them," Daverin says, and she adds, "It's funny how your high school mind thinks. Everything seems so simple, so black and white. Now things have become grey."

Most importantly, the low-key descriptions of Daverin's increasing withdrawal from social activities, especially those involving men, provide the stepping stones toward a particularly memorable outburst on a nightclub dance floor, when she loudly accuses her partner of molesting her before running out into the street. When the readers begin to suspect that there could be deeper emotional or psychological reasons for Daverin's behavior than the author has shown so far, Musca springs two totally unsuspected surprises. One occurs in the form of a revelation Daverin makes while visiting a grave site with her father; the second has to do with the contents of an unsent letter (addressed to Daverin's mother), which provides the information identified as "never to be forgotten" in the quotation on the first page of the book.

Beautifully crafted and superbly reader-friendly, *My Former Self* deserves a wide readership.
WAYNE CUNNINGHAM (October 28, 2013)

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