



Shadow of the Lions

Christopher Swann

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Tradition, honor, and secrets knit a deadly web at the prestigious Blackburne boarding school. The “rules are stark as barbed wire against snow: you will not lie, nor cheat, nor steal, nor tolerate those who do.” Which is too bad for Matthias Glass, whose betrayal of the code sets up a tragic series of events, in literary thriller *Shadow of the Lions*. After Matthias’s best friend, Fritz, disappears, he’s left to confront both the past and the person he thought he was.

Christopher Swann holds a PhD in creative writing and is the English department chair at Holy Innocents’ Episcopal School. His deft mastery of language and his sense for academia come through the novel strongly. *Shadow of the Lions* is believable, tense, and rich. Blackburne’s insular community is the perfect stage for this literary thriller, which earns positive comparisons to *Dead Poets Society* and *The Marriage Plot*. Matthias’s tenure as an English teacher dovetails nicely with his memories of being a student at Blackburne. In boarding school, history is doomed to repeat itself, and the microcosm of intense emotion makes *Shadow of the Lions* extremely satisfying.

Swann pulls no punches, and he isn’t shy about revealing his characters at their worst. Matthias, in particular, squares off with his ego again and again. Although he’s had some notoriety after graduation, the pink cloud evaporated quickly, leaving him bitter and full of self-doubt: “I, the product of that school so dedicated to rigorously training its students to achieve success, had soared out into the wider world, briefly scaled the empyrean heights, and then plummeted to earth. In short, I had failed.” Part of him hopes to find redemption at Blackburne, but instead he is plunged into a scandal that forces him to revisit his failures.

Witty, fast paced, and satisfying, *Shadow of the Lions* is a perfect literary thriller for back-to-school season.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (July/August 2017)

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