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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

Sharene

Rocky Wilson
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Rocky Wilson's unusual novel, *Sharene*, begins with the title character's funeral. The remainder of the book explores the last few years in the life of Sharene Marsena, a remarkably devout teenager, as she moves from one test of faith to the next, beginning with a rape. Infected with HIV from the assault, she prays for strength, rather than healing. "Sharene didn't pray for a cure for her disease. Not that she didn't believe in His powers to provide such a cure, but because she felt unworthy to receive such healing in this lifetime."

Sharene's unwavering trust in God's will leads her on a harrowing and incredible journey. As she deals with the aftermath of the rape, her path eventually brings her to South America, placing her in the unlikely position of infiltrating a drug lord's operation for the CIA based on a resemblance to his girlfriend. While the circumstances may stretch the limit of credulity, the scenes of her CIA training and adventures at the drug lord's compound give the most depth to Sharene's character, allowing her to show determination and strength beyond her religious devotion.

Sharene's agreement to take part in the CIA's plan intensifies the overall impression of her as a selfless martyr. Rather than spending her last days with family and the young man she loves, Sharene continues to follow the course she feels God has set before her. Relentlessly "hunted" by Satan throughout the story, she confronts and ultimately defeats evil with the depth of her faith even as she nears a final collapse.

For those who like a few flaws in their heroes or heroines, Sharene may be too perfect. Her extraordinary physical beauty is described frequently, evidently meant to convey a reflection of the pure beauty within. "God obviously had smiled when he made this child," we are told. Her faithful devotion to God impresses everyone she meets; most are significantly changed after crossing her path, with many left questioning their own lack of faith.

Wilson, a freelance writer, shows skill in the structure of his novel, with the final chapter neatly echoing the first, and several well-crafted metaphors and interesting images throughout. His writing style is competent and unique, though there is a peculiar tendency to refer to characters by both first and last names well beyond their initial introduction. Equally distracting is a penchant for avoiding pronouns, occasionally replacing them with descriptive phrases like "the young traveler from Alabama," or "the beautiful virgin."

The author's strong message regarding Christianity is clearly represented in the exceptionally devout character of Sharene. While some readers will surely find the story inspirational, others may find it preachy and unrealistic. Regardless, Rocky Wilson is a capable writer who may well find his niche in Christian or inspirational literature.
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