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Foreword Review POETRY

The Hobo's Crowbar

JonArno Lawson
Alec Dempster, Illustrator
Porcupine's Quill (Sep 30, 2016)
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F. Scott Fitzgerald once apologized for writing a long letter by saying he didn't have time to write a shorter one. In *The Hobo's Crowbar*, poet JonArno Lawson has taken the time needed to write verses that are short, witty, and a whole lot of fun.

More than six dozen free-verse poems make up the collection, some as brief as four lines but a few running the length of a page. Each poem is self-contained, and they needn't be read in order. All the entries have something to say, but it's the shorter poems that really sparkle, most of them inviting—and some demanding—immediate rereading to enjoy the full effect.

The collection does everything poetry should do, offering fresh perspectives on the familiar, teasing the imagination with doors that open to a variety of interpretations, and delivering verses that sing with a syntax all their own. Lawson is a master word-picker, and whimsical wordplay shows off his skill to advantage.

Language is never just a vehicle to an idea or image, but is a destination in itself. A poem called "Is It?" creates a series of cleverly confusing constructions based on the two words of the title, tangling each stanza into the one that follows in a way that purposely creates a delightful muddle.

Most of the poems are lighthearted, and vibrant with cockeyed imagery. In one, a duck wears a tux; in another, a nanny as thin as a pin drives a ninny and her mini granny to a local inn; and while Adam weeps as they're expelled from Eden, Eve, being shrewd, keeps the seeds in her cheeks. Below the frothy surface, many of the poems offer something more, like the four-liner that goes, "Part of the fun's resisting / Part of the fun's giving in / Part of the fun's life insisting that / we do it again and again."

The book is gift-worthy and visually appealing, printed on heavy paper in a color scheme of espresso and café au lait. Nineteen woodcuts by the talented Alec Dempster echo the playfulness of the poems and manage to capture not only the images conjured by the verses, but their emotional atmosphere as well.

While the poems are a wonderful way to expose younger audiences to the flights of imagination words make possible, kids should not have all the fun. *The Hobo's Crowbar* knows no age limits.

SUSAN WAGGONER (May 16, 2017)

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