Book Review: Women Who Were Warned

By: Yasmine Dashti

*“Women’s untold lives are controlled- fish-bowled-”*

LindaAnn Loschiavo’s *Women Who Were Warned* writes to the female experience known painfully well and brings the trials of girlhood and womanhood into light with flair and emotion. Her rich language and intimate understanding pull the complexity of female identity beyond the confines which we often impose it within. These 29 poems explore not only femininity but its forced operation in a cruel, patriarchal world. You hold your breath at every line as Loschiavo’s language and girls slowly draw you into their worlds. However, you identify and experience life, this collection serves as an important message and opens a dialogue that is too often shunned away and silenced.

The collections touches on many themes that travel through the pages. These themes can be triggering for some readers. Poems such as ‘Distorted Mirror’ explore the terrifying impact intense body standards pushed by the media have on girlhood. ‘We’re besties now’ the young speaker says as she and her friend bond over their struggle against disordered eating. Disordered eating effects millions of people every year and Loschiavo captures that mindset by carefully constructing the competition the arises between the friends and the ‘empty’ sentiments in their friendship and stomachs. This duality reveals the complexity and trigger-feeding friendship between the two girls, and it is both terrifying and captivating to read. Furthermore, by mentioning anorexia and bulimia by name, Loschiavo ensures that these images are not just literary but tell the reader upfront what is happening to ensure we are aware of its deadly impact.

Some longer and others shorter, Loschiavo has a talent for packing meaning and emotion into the shortest of lines. Shorter pieces such as ‘Stained Lass,’ with lines like, ‘the patriarchy ruled the afterlife’ speak to numerous themes and experiences without having to list in detail. In this way, Loschiavo encourages readers to contemplate her words, allowing them to sink in and be acknowledged as our eyes run across the pages. With a thirst for complexity, Loschiavo doesn’t shy away from potential controversies but plunges deep within the institutions that hold women bondage.

Within 48 pages, Loschiavo carefully constructs a multitude of emotional experiences- the joyful, the painful, the friendship, the domination of the mirror that reflects societal standards, the sexual gaze imposed, the terrifying expectations- her poetry gives words to what so many are unable to explain. Readers are encouraged to reckon with their own experiences and acknowledge and understand the deep-rooted misogyny, patriarchy, and intensity of male domination on womanhood. Every poem delves deeper than the last, every page sets up a new fear but with every word readers are left with the voices of Loschiavo’s girls ringing.