Mister Wonderful: A Love Story by Daniel Clowes

Amazon Best Books of the Month, April 2011: Born out of a series that ran in the New York Times Magazine in 2008, Daniel Clowes’s graphic novel Mister Wonderful details one night in the life and in the mind of Marshall, a cynical 40-something divorced shlub presumed familiar to fans of Clowes’s work. Marshall’s pessimism is in direct conflict with the situation in which we first meet our man: sitting in a coffee shop waiting on a blind date. With the mystery woman nearly 30 minutes late, Marshall’s mind runs rampant wondering how he ended up middle-aged and alone, willing to meet a perfect stranger who may not fit the fantasy role he’s imagined for his next partner (someone to eat bagels with on a Sunday morning, eager to read the sections of the paper he doesn’t). Although the down trodden Marshall may be recognizable to fans of Clowes’s previous forays into contemptuous male reflections, it is also arguably his most sanguine effort yet. Marshall’s date, Natalie, eventually does show, and the events of their evening would test even the strongest of couples. Clowes often shifts to more elementary styling when we get inside Marshall’s head, and when a panel shows an imagined Marshall handing Natalie a 35,000-word treatise on how you’re the greatest human being who ever existed, we know Marshall’s heart has made the leap from snark to saccharine, and that may have been all he needed from this date, anyway. --Alexandra Foster

With Mr. Wonderful: A Love Story, Daniel Clowes covers much of the same dour territory as his books Ice Haven, Wilson and The Death Ray, with one notable exception: a happy ending. Well, let’s say its as close to a happy ending as Clowes ever ventures.

Marshall and Natalie, a couple approaching middle age, meet on a blind date and stumble through an awkward, embarrassing, stressful evening together. Secrets are revealed, past relationships snap at their heels, strained affections are formed, and despite the shrapnel of forced companionship flying through the story, the couple manages to find common ground, and--dare I say it?--a chance at love.
Clowes typically exquisite art and book production, his unique sensibility and approach to story are as strong as ever. He has an uncanny, expert use of the comic medium as a vehicle for disarming personal stories. His characters are still self-centered as always. Marshalls internal monologue word balloons often overlay and hide Natalies words like discount stickers in a clearance sale, cleverly illustrating how Marshall seldom pays full attention to what his date--or anyone else--is saying. The effect reveals his desperation and self-doubt, unlike previous Clowes heroes who seem oblivious to their sins.

I came away from Mr. Wonderfull feeling positive and sympathetic, unlike Clowes last novella, Wilson, which left a scummy ring around the tub. Even if Im fooling myself, Im sticking to it.

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