

A Broken Heart Heals with Music and Friendship in MY LITTLE HEART, RUTHIE

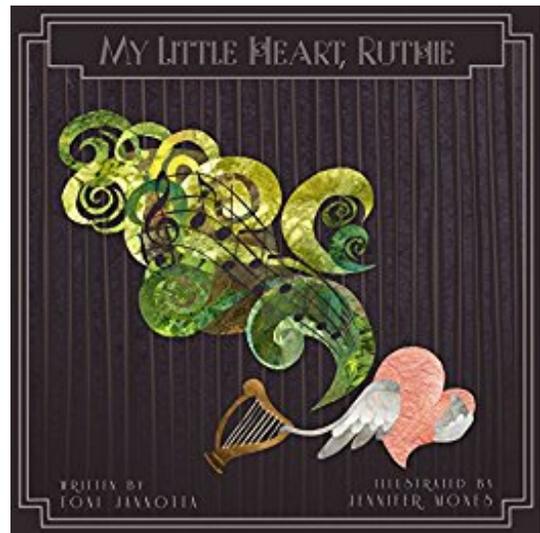
indiereader.com/2017/10/broken-heart-heals-music-friendship-little-heart-ruthie/

IR Staff

October 27, 2017

Ruthie is a heart that's been broken. At the beginning of the story, we find her lying in a cell, clutching a harp in one her drooping wings. People have been cruel to her, and she is wallowing in worthlessness and self-blame. But then she hears a voice coaxing her to get up. The voice belongs to a trumpet-playing heart, and with his help—and his music—Ruthie finds a way out of her prison.

You could say that music is one of the main characters in this book. Written by jazz vocalist, songwriter, and composer Toni Jannotta, *MY LITTLE HEART, RUTHIE* comes to life in an accompanying CD that features an original jazz suite and narration by the author. Even when read on its own, however, the book maintains a rhythmic, musical feel thanks to its rhyming verse and to illustrator Jennifer Mones' mixed-media images of swirling colors and musical notes.



Jannotta has said that the book is based on memories of abuse she suffered as a girl. In the story, we learn that Ruthie once played her harp for people in hopes of bringing them joy, but instead they laughed at her. “They barked at my playing and they snapped at my strings,” she says. “I saw such a cruelty show.” *RUTHIE* is more poem than story; it works on abstraction and metaphor: hearts learning to soar again, light finding its way into a dark cave. It aims to speak to young people who have suffered emotional wounds, from playground taunts to more serious abuses.

That said, readers looking for more of a concrete narrative may find less to grasp onto, and the verse occasionally strays into clichéd platitudes. This could be more of a grown-up's gripe; perhaps it's not so problematic for young people who are learning to navigate big emotions for the first time. At its heart, *RUTHIE* is a song. It is best experienced read aloud, or listened to with the accompanying music. If the prose occasionally falters, the singsong rhythms smooth over the bumps. It will no doubt help some wounded hearts to heal.

~Michelle Vames for IndieReader