



A Plot for Pridemore

Stephen Roth

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Exaggeration brings humor to the publicity stunt this mayoral main character has in store.

Machiavelli would have admired Monroe Tolliver. He isn't a prince, just a mayor, but he has a plan to save his town. The fact that it involves explosives, kickbacks, and trickery is all part of the plot to get Pridemore, Missouri, going again. For if there's one thing Tolliver has learned in his nearly fifty-year span as mayor, it's that real goodness can be a liability, but the pretense is always very effective.

Set in America's heartland, *A Plot for Pridemore* is a send-up of small-town politics. Pridemore is in danger of dying out. The new bypass has funneled traffic away from what was once a prosperous place for tourists vacationing in the Ozarks. The mayor seizes on the fact that Lewis and Clark passed close enough that way to turn a natural bridge and network of caves into a roadside attraction. Like Br'er Fox constructing a doll out of a lump of tar, the mayor dresses up his plan with enough made-for-television sensationalism to lure the media to Pridemore to cover the rescue of a slow-witted kid trapped in the cave.

It's a sticky situation all right, and Roth spins his tale with a sure hand. He uses omniscient narration to keep his plates in the air with multiple viewpoints even as the publicity stunt goes awry. He uses exaggeration to poke fun at civic pride with almost Twain-like humor, like when he calls the town hall "one of those brick monstrosities that had all the charm of an East German dormitory." He also creates characters to root for, including a jaded young newspaper reporter fresh out of journalism school, and characters that defy easy stereotyping, such as an aged skateboarding spelunker and beer-buzzed engineering expert brought in to save the day.

Some of these same characters are never fully developed, however. For example, the reporter remains the hapless onlooker, the kid in the cave is the clueless victim, and the old mayor stays the villain masterminding the whole fiasco (though he is the most complex and interesting character). There are also a few inconsistencies regarding the high-tech era in which the story supposedly takes place—battered maps rather than GPS, bedroom phones rather than cell phones, among others.

This is the kind of novel that begs to be read.

TRINA CARTER (Summer 2014)

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