

## Adventures of a Lifetime

**M. Lawrence Moore**

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*In the funny and sorrowful short stories of Adventures of a Lifetime, young misfits struggle to find their ways in the world.*

M. Lawrence Moore's short story collection *Adventures of a Lifetime* depicts the struggles of outsiders trying to come to terms with their communities.

Humor, most often seen in demonstrations of the slippery nature of interpersonal communication, balances with tragedy in these tales. Most of the entries share themes, focusing on plucky outsiders who grate against conformity, even as they try to find their places in society. In "Luke and Jan," two mysterious strangers parachute into a suspicious rural town where a girl has accused a boy of rape. A group of ruffians who work for the girl's father guard the roads in and out of the town. Rumors have spread that witnesses are coming from Harlem to discredit the girl's story; these hired guns look for two Black men, assuming that everyone in Harlem is Black.

Meanwhile, Nanette, an immigrant who has a connection to the incident, acts as the town's moral center. Nanette's memories of encountering Texans in her home country and refusing to believe that they were Americans because of their accents, and the local priest overhearing the parachuters hiding in the church bell tower singing and believing them to be devils, bring forth how geographical misunderstandings impact people's communication. A courtroom scene ties these strands of the story together, and themes of prejudice and conformity are brought to the fore.

"The Group," which is set in the Gila Wilderness, follows the daily routines of young people who have been assigned to a wilderness rehabilitation camp. The rituals of the camp are contrasted with the severe beauty of the landscape, which is described as harsh. Some of the camp's residents appear elsewhere, too, including Ram, who is neurodivergent and who misunderstands much of what others say to him. Ram's interactions with others are oppositional, including with a psychologist to whom he explains his mother as a person who likes fish, and who punishes Ram for his perceived mockery. Still, not every story in the collection adheres to the book's general themes: "A Certain Man" is fabulistic, and "The Retired Engineer" is a far-fetched spy story.

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MATT BENZING (September 10, 2022)

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