



Christmasville

Michael Dutton

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In *Christmasville* tomatoes have only recently come into existence the changing colors of autumn are unheard of and the only person who notices or cares is fourteen-year old protagonist Mary Jane Higgins. Mary Jane begins the book by examining a map studying the placement of buildings which for her change location every two months. Those two months December and January constitute a year in Christmasville and on January 31st all is forgotten the clock wound back and Christmas begins again with the protagonist fourteen years old as she has been for as long as she can remember. Mary Jane scrambles to figure out why enlisting her best friend and two local eccentrics to help.

Michael Dutton a graduate of Richard Stockton College and a participant in Penn State's graduate Comparative Literature program is the founder of Linden Park Publishers Ltd. *Christmasville* Dutton's premiere novel sets Mary Jane on a series of journeys to discover the truth about her town a truth that is only dimly revealed by the novel's end. Between the journeys Dutton creates little bits of mythos cleverly explaining how tomatoes are named or roses. Readers get a heavy dose of Christmas traditions and small town socializing with all of the expectedly unique citizens. The novel bloats a bit with unnecessary scenes a tendency that sucks some of the suspense from the story. Dutton is also guilty of preaching to readers about acceptance and goodness which for a young adult audience may not be a bad thing.

In fact the book seems to speak to that demographic. Young adults will enjoy the mystery of Christmasville and the spunk and smarts of Mary Jane. The details of school sledding and loose-lipped best friends will appeal to those readers much like the sassy characters of Meg Cabot's supernatural novels. The language of the book is appropriate as well though Mary Jane and her author occasionally find themselves carried away with the joy of simile. Still curiosity keeps the book moving as readers strive to understand the mysterious donkey the fortuneteller's predictions and the reason no one in Christmasville has ever heard of New York City or John F. Kennedy. The choice of time setting seems a trifle odd as the story takes place in the 1960's to no explicable end. That in itself may give young adult readers some pause but not much. The details of time are seldom used and Christmas traditions offer the benefit of having changed little over the decades.

Younger audiences may fall in love with Mary Jane and eagerly await the companion novel *Finding Christmasville* which will perhaps further unwind the mysteries of the town. Until then in this age of Harry Potter and Chris Von Allsburg the magical realism of the novel should prove very appealing to readers both young and old. (August 21, 2009)

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