

Daughters of Muscadine

Monic Ductan

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Monic Ductan's relationship-focused short story collection *Daughters of Muscadine* traces a small town's triumphs and tragedies.

Small towns can be comforting and oppressive—a source of connection, but also the root of larger fears. Muscadine is one such town. Families have settled here for generations, growing more intertwined through friendships and marriages.

In “Gris-Gris,” a girl's disappearance during her senior year reverberates through the community. It's a traumatic event for her classmates; in a connected story, Kasha, one of the missing girl's basketball teammates, leaves Muscadine behind. When she is called back years later, she has to navigate old resentments with her estranged sister, Ansley. In another story, the missing girl's best friend feels stuck in Muscadine. Her excitement for the future dwindles, and she feels like she is not good enough for the colleges to which she was accepted; she refuses to think of her state as one of depression. Elsewhere, other young women and girls harness the energy and stubbornness of youth, too, balancing this with increasing awareness of themselves and their society.

In “The Sense of Touch” and “Daughter,” the nuances of building and maintaining relationships are centered amid the stories of older women. And melancholy arises throughout the book—as though the hallmark of being from Muscadine is that everyone is a little sad and a little frustrated. Beyond this melancholy, though, lies an air of protectiveness and acceptance. Muscadine is both a place to run from and a place to run toward.

In the tender and enthusiastic stories of *Daughters of Muscadine*, people's connections in their small town run deep.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (September / October 2023)

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