



Easter: McEaster Valley

Walter R. Hoge

ReadersMagnet

(74pp)

978-1-952896-13-2

Easter: McEaster Valley is an imaginative children's story in which a grown-up's life is transformed during a walk in the woods.

In Walter R. Hoge's philosophical early reader *Easter: McEaster Valley*, a man is introduced to a strange, vibrant world during his morning walk in the Sierra foothills.

While walking with his dog, a man is drawn to enter a shining, golden passage that leads to a beautiful valley. The farther into it that he travels, the better he feels. His senses are enhanced. He is more alert. All is well until he falls, rolls down the trail, and lands in bushes. His dog is nowhere in sight.

Injured, lost, and becoming hypothermic, the man falls asleep. The next morning, an aged, bearded man appears to him, saying, "We've been waiting for you. You have been chosen to come to our valley." The lost man is introduced to wonders, mystery, strange science experiments—and an offer of immortality. He encounters intriguing inventions, including devices to produce heat, light, and energy without fossil fuels; he learns about the healing effects of plant-based foods and medicines; he is witness to an odd, rather disgusting way to store food; and he is introduced to a way of life that's marked by simplicity, peace, and cooperation.

In addition to following the lost man's adventures, the book pronounces life lessons, including how getting lost can bring a person where they were meant to be; that there is much more to life than money and possessions; and that, if honored, one's dreams and aspirations can lead to accomplishments that benefit the whole world. While not advocating for any one religion, the book mentions the Christian God as the creator who made Earth as a place for joy and learning.

As the man discovers all that the planet has to offer, he maintains his sense of curiosity. Indeed, both the text and the illustrations indicate that this is crucial: the lost man's open-mindedness is credited with his ability to draw knowledge from his fun. But although it is written from the viewpoint of an adult, the narrative and its lessons remain accessible to its target audience. Its lead character models a thoughtful, non judgmental attitude toward all that he sees; acceptance of the fact that adventures often come with hardships; and thankfulness for the kindness he encounters. He also evinces care and concern for his family when faced with a hard choice, too, leading to a bittersweet conclusion to his adventures.

But the prose is heavy on descriptions and light on concrete exchanges. Though active, it moves with speed to deliver its bevy of science facts, imaginative solutions to pressing global problems, and unusual perspectives. This leads to jumbled ideas at times. Further impeding the book are its malapropisms, missing words, and punctuation errors. Still, the illustrations are expressive and bright, with imaginative features and eye-catching colors.

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KRISTINE MORRIS (June 7, 2022)

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