

## Heartland

**Ana Simo**

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*Heartland* arrives in a saturated swirl of inner monologue and devoted observances.

The novel's unnamed narrator grew up in Elmira, a town with distinctive characteristics and a people whose specificity seems to have been cultivated by their limitations. She suffers through severe writer's block and settles in for a long con, discarding her old life to plan a murder.

Her planned victim, McCabe, committed the crime of losing Bebe, a healthily sexual woman with a gorgeous body whom the narrator once pined after. Enticed by McCabe's stability and riches, Bebe was convinced of the relationship's potential—it was nothing that the narrator could offer her. McCabe's inability to hold Bebe proves too much for the narrator to bear. She must die.

The narrator less plans the crime than she does study McCabe, though, wondering about the emotional angles of carrying out the murder. She is fascinated by McCabe, and by her body in particular. She is repulsed; she is drawn in. McCabe becomes like the sun to her: she cannot look directly at her, but studies every inch that she can observe, one by one.

In between obsessions, the narrator relives her small town past—reminiscing people she once knew, and considering her role in society and the roles of her parents, who worked as servants to someone known simply as “the Judge.”

Much of *Heartland* comes through the narrator's perspective, with bits of dialogue sprinkled throughout. She has an unreliable air, especially as her early monologues recount drinking and severe depression. Her mind deals in chaos and the impossible. In a novel with a hint of magical realism, whether the elaborate and unbelievable details she relates are true is anybody's guess.

HANNAH HOHMAN (January/February 2018)

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