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General

Lord of Misrule: A Novel
Jaimy Gordon
McPherson and Company
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Jaimy Gordon must be as passionate about horses and horseracing as the ensemble of characters she has created in *Lord of Misrule*. Only a devotee could conjure the insider world of the sport to the equal satisfaction of the uninitiated and the horse lover.

Indian Mound Downs is where horses and people down on their luck, or on their personal track to oblivion, end up. When Maggie Koderer and Tommy Hansel appear, they upset the existing order. They plan to win. Maggie sets about learning all she can about being a horse groom from Medicine Ed, who can stew luck with leaves from a graveyard tree and the blood and sweat of a legendary horse. In the process, she learns to love the colorful residents of the stables: Deucey Gifford, Suitcase Smithers, Kidstuff, and, of course, Medicine Ed. Moreover, she is seduced by the idiosyncratic and mysterious bookmaker, Two-Tie, and the horse trainer, Jim Dale Biggs. Maggie is also a seducer, drawing both good and evil to her.

The relationships in *Lord of Misrule*—between lovers, between grooms and horses, and between horses and jockeys—are revealed through the speech of its characters. Readers expecting conventional dialogue may be confused by the use of "you" in the interior monologues. Nevertheless, the presence of fully drawn characters is clear. As the climactic race approaches, Tommy thinks, "Before, you thought you knew and felt your way along blindly." He sees this race, featuring the black horse, Lord of Misrule, as the convergence of good, evil, and mysticism. "Everything else is bums…Assorted lost souls." The gritty Deucey makes herself felt with remarks like, "This ain't the 4-H Club pony rides at the Pocahontas County Fair," and Jim Dale's repulsiveness oozes out in his "fatty" voice, sounding like "masculine gravy with metal shavings." When Maggie groomed Little Spinoza, "his dapples came up like a god's golden fingerprints," and he "just bent into it like a ballerina in a *pas de deux*." Ms. Gordon is a master of language. *Lord of Misrule* has poetry, intrigue, action, love, and hate—in short, something for every mature reader whether or not she has ever been on a horse or to a

racetrack.

Ms. Gordon has published four other books, including *Bogeywoman*, which was on the *Los Angeles Times* list of "Best Books of 2000." *Lord of Misrule* is a National Book Award winner.

Geraldine A. Richards