

Mr. Nicholas

Christopher de Vinck

Paraclete Press (Sep 21, 2021)

Hardcover \$20.00 (180pp)

978-1-64060-735-4

In Christopher de Vinck's novel *Mr. Nicholas*, a hardened newspaperman's life is rocked by a small boy's love and an encounter with a mysterious old man.

On his way to interview a beekeeper, Jim sees Anna's car clinging to the edge of the road. He stops to help, and they connect—as if each were tapped into the same current. But once married, their differences open a gap between them. Anna suggests that a baby could bridge that gap. But when JB is born with Down syndrome, Jim's rejection of his son leads Anna to file for separation.

Jim feels disappointed in his career; he faces a sad and lonely Christmas. Gradually, though, the time he spends with his son opens his eyes to a world in which magic is real and everyone is worth loving. Anna cannot see the changes in Jim, and when JB goes missing, she blames him. She suspects that JB's friend, Mr. Nicholas, a scavenger and owner of a hardware store that hides a mystery, is responsible, too.

Told in Jim's voice, this is a story about the power of a boy's relentless love. Tense and stressful at first, it makes the changes in Jim palpable through his inner reflections, his conversations with others, and through small actions that reveal his growing love for his son. Suspense grows as Mr. Nicholas comes under investigation for JB's disappearance. Jim questions the old man, who asks him some probing questions in return. In the book's satisfying conclusion, Jim realizes the importance and beauty of the ordinariness that makes life worth living and gives Christmas its true meaning.

Sensitive and heartwarming, *Mr. Nicholas* is a magical Christmas story in which lives and hearts are changed by a small boy's unconditional love.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September / October 2021)

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