

My Radio Radio

Jessie van Eerden

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Its pages are sharpened by contrasts—between the dull nature of a regimented religious existence, and the colorful needs of a young girl.

In a communal home in a quiet Indiana town, between four walls painted in wildly different colors, Omi Ruth works to come of age. Jessie van Eerden's *My Radio Radio* details Omi's intentional awakenings in piquant, empathetic prose.

Omi wakes one morning to find herself at the threshold of adulthood, her insides announcing her presence there in a way she cannot outrun. A bowl tips inside of her; she learns that her beloved older brother has been killed in a car crash; she encounters her first love, her "silent silver-white," in an unlocked bedroom down the hall. In a matter of hours, she must grapple with being newly alone, freshly needed, and demonstrably no longer a child.

A new housemate, Tracie, who conceals more than one secret beneath her heavy sweaters, pushes Omi's boundaries even more, forcing her to confront both her isolation and the nature of love, particularly considered within the sheltered religious environment of Solomon's Porch. As Omi and Tracie's bond deepens, and as the community's secrets come more and more to light, Omi must come to terms with both the limitations imposed by her unique home life, and the probability that its odd movements began from a kind of love whose holiness she has not begun to fathom.

Van Eerden's is a story of strained adolescence, made all the more complex by the demands of the small religious community at its center. Its pages are sharpened by contrasts—between the dull nature of a regimented religious existence, and the colorful needs of a young girl; between the ability to imagine great and magical bursts of beauty, and the stifled awareness of the unengaged world beyond one's front door. Characters are drawn in all of their peculiarity, with such honesty that even those who seem outwardly small-minded are afforded depth. A reclusive preacher is not just a preacher; a boundary-pushing neighbor may be capable of kindness after all. Even Omi Ruth, who longs for wings, ends up finding that there are things on the ground worth her time.

My Radio Radio is a lovely, challenging, and fair-minded approach to the particular depths of those who populate small spiritual sects.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (Summer 2016)

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