

None but the Righteous

Chantal James

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Chantal James's novel *None but the Righteous* follows a man's lifelong search of truth and meaning.

When he's a teenager, Ham, a foster child who was taken in by sophisticated Pearl and her son, Wally, meets a traveler, Mayfly. Of her own choosing, Mayfly has no home of her own. Around the time of this meeting, Pearl gives Ham a mysterious pendant with a long, twisted history that's now aligned to him. Later, after Hurricane Katrina, Ham drifts from place to place, trying out Mayfly's bohemian lifestyle until he meets Deborah and her family. Their suspicious welcome leads him to search for real belonging.

Throughout the story, Ham charms women, but he lets them down, too. He abandons Mayfly, Deborah, and Pearl, while the spirit of St. Martin de Porres—who is ominous in Ham's life, with his own story and taking many forms—preys on Ham's lostness, helping to explain his unpredictable behavior. Ham's spontaneity also enables him to form new friendships that remind him of what a family is. His success comes through rising above the low expectations that others have of him. With patience, he discovers what he wants for himself: love. He seeks it out with intention.

While the narrative's trajectory follows a line from fallen to restored and redeemed, its chapters meander, folding back and forth in time—and in between Ham's, Mayfly's, and Deborah's perspectives. Its tension is succulent thanks, in part, to the rootlessness of its characters, who are always in motion. Forays into the fantastical come via magic potions, dangerous foods, and blended cultures, while Hurricane Katrina stands in for cataclysmic events in general.

Lasting relationships form the foundation of the fluid, musical novel *None but the Righteous*.

MARI CARLSON (January / February 2022)

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