



Spheres of Disturbance

Amy Schutzer

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With compassion, Schutzer shares a quirky story, balanced in its humor and solemnity.

A pregnant potbellied pig and a dying woman are at the heart of this novel about birth, death, and the power of love. Amy Schutzer's whimsical *Spheres of Disturbance* is narrated by nine different characters, including a pig named Charlotta, during a single day, as a small town comes to terms with one woman's decision to die, even as she acknowledges all that she loves and will miss.

It's the morning of October 19, 1985, and Avery is getting ready for a big garage sale. She hopes her Vietnamese potbellied pig can wait to go into labor until the yard sale is over. Across town, Sammy, Avery's lover, is desperately pretending that her mother, Helen, isn't dying. For the past year, Sammy has rejected anyone who tried to get her to talk about what is happening. But Helen has had enough, and her friend Joe has agreed to help.

To complicate matters, Helen's estranged family is headed her way with an aggressive, fast-talking lawyer. In Joe's family, his wife has befriended his sharp-tongued sister, and his daughter is beginning to question her sexuality. It's unclear whether Joe is just a kind man or, by helping Helen, he is trying to rectify his relationship with his dead father.

Initially, the multiple voices and story lines, while consistently entertaining, hold readers at arm's length. When the focus settles on Helen, the book drops below the surface and takes off.

Schutzer writes with compassion and a quirky sense of humor. Readers will feel like they've taken an autumn drive into the country and ended up at a garage sale where an Elvis cutout greets them at the door and an altar for confused moments offers comfort in the backyard.

It's Charlotta, the expectant mother pig, who serves as the story's final catalyst. "Charlotta walks up to Sammy's legs and leans her head against them ... conveying love." Later, Helen, barely hanging on to life, sees Charlotta in her pen with her piglets and is flooded with the bounty of life and aware of its fragility. The spheres of the title—family, lovers, and community—are interwoven with fear and desire. It all comes together at Avery's garage sale.

KAREN ACKLAND (Summer 2014)

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