

St. Christopher on Pluto

Nancy McKinley

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The winkingly endearing stories of Nancy McKinley's *St. Christopher on Pluto* function like a scrapbook, capturing life in a small Pennsylvania town through connected anecdotes that span decades.

Before their neighborhood Halloween party, an aging family man is coaxed to exchange his worn cow costume for a pig getup purchased at the Salvation Army; he fears that his wife is laughing at his expense, but ends up shimmying his way into her affections. One hometown hero arrives home in a box, greeted by the chants of a notorious church group and their signs declaring God's hatred; reverence is restored by his supportive neighbors. A high school football hero also returns home, his final days marked by the community's misunderstanding of AIDS.

Two misfit women connect all these friends and neighbors together: MK, who's determined to drive her grandma's classic car into every sunset; and her childhood friend, Colleen, who dyes her hair red and declares herself a Celtic warrior, raging on behalf of immigrants and soldiers alike.

Whether Colleen and MK are the centers of any given tale or not, their presence is felt. They come to represent every boundary-defying small-towner who simultaneously loves their community and is compelled to test its rules. As children, they write racy letters to soldiers in Vietnam, hoping not to be found out; as adults, they ride together through acts of questionable legality and to sites on the outskirts where they help those in need. Their relationships to God and country become murkier as they age, but also more refined; and while they may pine for more excitement than their hometown seems to provide, there are moments of joy and grandeur in their everyday lives that warrant celebration.

St. Christopher on Pluto takes respectful account of the relics and triumphs of small-town life.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2020)

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