

## The Byways: A Novel

**Mary Pascual**

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*Set in a colorful parallel world, the fantasy novel The Byways follows a girl who gets lost in order to find herself.*

In Mary Pascual's exciting fantasy novel *The Byways*, a lost girl gathers courage as she pursues self-discovery in a strange land.

One moment, CeeCee was racing down alleyways, fuming over a recent fight with her best friend Trudy. The next, she is trapped in a strange parallel dimension, the Byways. A mysterious old man tells her, "These are the byways and the bypassed and the letpasses and the letdowns"; it's a vague clue. Still, CeeCee travels through the Byways, looking for a way home. She makes dangerous enemies and surprising friends. And she learns that to escape the Byways to the outside world (which she can see but not reach), she must travel through a mirror that only works for those who can see, and accept, themselves properly.

The Byways are filled with half-human, half-animal people, many of whom have special powers. Some people are born in the Byways, whereas others, like CeeCee, are sucked into them. And a large portion of the population of the Byways is poor, oppressed by an evil queen. Among these "bypassed" people, CeeCee finds refuge and kindness, learning lessons about generosity and not judging people based on their material wealth. She witnesses as oppressed Byway citizens rally toward revolution; she is also party to their compassion. Among these generous people, CeeCee comes to wonder why she would want to return to a world where she does not fit in.

CeeCee is charming and spunky, but not much is shared about her life before she enters the Byways. It is disclosed that she has ADHD and a sensory processing disorder; both made it difficult for her to focus in school, leading to troublesome outbursts. In the Byways, however, CeeCee realizes that her energy and passion can be an asset. She and her love interest, Jesse, hatch a plot to reclaim stolen items from evil Dr. M. Awful-Ease.

In the course of CeeCee's pursuit of self-acceptance, vibrant imagery abounds. CeeCee walks through a charming marketplace where she barter for coffee; she finds refuge in a stunning magical garden; she flees from the beautiful, deadly jib jab (a swirling mass of ethereal colors that drains a person's life force). The novel's descriptions are rich, in part because they're filtered through CeeCee's perspective; she is passionate in detailing her new Byways setting. However, some elements of the novel (as with a description of a half-slug man who watches child pornography) are unnecessarily graphic, and a reconciliation that appears late in the novel is rushed through.

Set in a colorful parallel world, the fantasy novel *The Byways* follows a girl who gets lost in order to find herself.

VIVIAN TURNBULL (March 17, 2023)

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