

## The Distance from Four Points

**Margo Orlando Littell**

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In Margo Orlando Littell's quiet, compelling novel, *The Distance from Four Points*, a woman finds herself reeling from grief and a reversal of fortune.

When Robin's husband, Ray, is killed in a kayaking accident, he leaves behind a sudden void, financial troubles, and several dubious "investment properties" in Robin's hometown of Four Points, Pennsylvania. Though accustomed to a moneyed life in suburban Pittsburgh, Robin moves back to Four Points with her daughter, Hayley, and becomes the reluctant landlord of her husband's rundown rentals. With grim determination, she tackles renovations, repairs, spiteful tenants, and squatters.

Beyond this, there are dark memories of Robin's earlier life in Four Points. Her childhood was impoverished and dysfunctional, and her teen years involved prostitution, followed by the death of her infant son. Back in this close-knit Appalachian landscape, Robin encounters people and places she was determined to forget.

Robin carries the novel with her melancholy confusion, grit, and wry perception. Her former Four Points roommate, Cindy, is a brash, blunt ally. Having overcome many of her own troubles, Cindy takes defiant pride in her job as a Wal-mart cashier. With Cindy, Robin learns to renavigate Four Points and find a new sense of purpose.

The novel is rich with details about the southwest corner of Pennsylvania: its haunting natural beauty and economic blight, the colloquial use of *ynz* instead of you, Sheetz convenience stores, gun racks on trucks, and an underlying sense of community. Robin's emergence as a resilient businesswoman is heartening, as is her eventual willingness to stay in Four Points and help make it a better place. Most impressive, however, is that Robin allows an honesty within herself—no longer hiding and feeling shame about her past, but letting go of a tight, repressed "breath she'd always been destined to release."

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