

The End of the Straight and Narrow

David McGlynn

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This exceptionally haunting collection of nine short stories about people reaching for consolation, meaning, and hope is the first such compilation by McGlynn, who teaches at Lawrence University. There is agony in these stories—childhood cancer, infertility, natural disasters (landslide, wildfire), heart disease, blindness, adultery—and there is forgiveness and redemption. Here are everyday characters coping with what life has handed them, their religious faith providing both guidance and the impossibility of a human solution.

In “Deep in the Heart,” young Wesley, dying from osteosarcoma, is nauseous and worried, waiting for death to come. Neighbors and classmates come and go with casseroles, well wishes, and notes. “What seems unimportant now will become essential later,” writes McGlynn—essential when his friends and family, remembering Wesley’s struggles and his death, vie to grab the most out of life that they can. Four stories stand independently; the last five interconnect as a mini-novel about a family in free fall. Randy’s mother Cordelia went blind fifteen years earlier in giving birth to him; her husband, her caregiver, and her children move in parallel lives around her disability until mistrust and doubt erupt. An author to watch; a collection to savor.

LINDA BECK (November 14, 2008)

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