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Clarion Review ★★★★★ YOUNG ADULT FICTION

The Improbable Wonders of Moojie Littleman

Robin Gregory
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This is young adult work for a crowd that has not yet relinquished its claim to awe.

Robin Gregory's *The Improbable Wonders of Moojie Littleman* is a strange and lovely work that winkingly lopes through one child's extraordinary boyhood.

Moojie is an earthquake-child. His true origins unknown, he lands on the doorstep of a convent as a baby. He is soon taken in, mysterious powers and all, by the Littlemans. But his idyllic life in a Wimbley Wood cottage goes sideways—first, when his growth takes a crooked turn; then, when his mother dies, leaving his father despondent and Moojie without a center.

A move to his heavy-drinking, emotionally distant grandfather's fainting goat farm—at first sold as a short-duration placement, but which it soon becomes obvious is more of a permanent resituation—forces Moojie to reorient himself to the magic that surrounds him. He resents "the rub of his grandfather's voice," and finds his only friend in his old cat, Phineas. The youngsters of the town alienate him, considering him odd. Which he is, as it turns out—delightfully so.

Moojie yearns to connect to the Light-Eaters, mysterious figures who emerge from a cave in the woods, and with whom he's forbidden to commune. They may just hold the secrets to Moojie's destiny—but the townspeople fear them and their prophecies of pandemonium, and any connection could mean a disastrous showdown. Moojie tests the boundaries anyway, moving everyone toward uncertainty.

Gregory's is a magical coming-of-age tale, in which time is sometimes fluid and natural boundaries seem like they might be transgressed. Language is graceful and unique, employing poetic schemes with musical effects, and seems guided at once by mysticism and a folklore quality. Chapter titles are long and descriptive in the style of classic children's literature, revealing progressions in advance without at all diminishing excitement. Danger is ever-present, though the tensions that propel the story forward are cushioned by the story's lilting charm.

From characters to locales, names and descriptions are both mysterious and evocative. Dialogue takes a wild turn, too, with characters substituting "tinker's cuss" and "cheese 'n' rice!" for expletives, and generally talking in a manner that is both out-of-time and entrancing.

The Light-Eaters hint at a wondrous cosmology that Moojie's mind is too "applesauce" to translate fully, but their revelations hold fascination, anyway. The technical setting is the Pacific coast; the technical time is the not-too-distant past; and yet the world created here holds a wonder not of our dimension.

Moojie's story is an enchanting one; it defies easy categorization, but is certain to secure the admiration of a diverse range of readerships. This is young adult work for a crowd that has not yet relinquished its claim to awe.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (May 11, 2017)

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