

The Red-Headed Pilgrim

Kevin Maloney

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With a mix of humor, melancholy, and pathos, Kevin Maloney's memorable novel *The Red-Headed Pilgrim* follows an office worker through his midlife crisis.

In his childhood, Kevin came to the realization that he was going to die. This drove him to search for beauty throughout his life. And after growing up in a mundane Oregon suburb, he longs to sow his wild oats and find meaning on the road. He first decides to follow a woman; she will spend time with him, but she has no romantic interest in him. Later, his adventures take him to a failed roadside attraction in Montana and to a small Vermont town where he meets a woman "with an uncanny resemblance to George Washington"; she changes his entire life, even though he meets her while pretending to be a cowboy.

Maloney's prose is expert in its formation. The book's sections are packed with witty references and sly digs at Kevin's lack of self-awareness. There are scenes that are downright heartbreaking, too. Indeed, in addition to Kevin's freewheeling adventures, the novel covers the consequences that adventuring can produce. Kevin enters into a far-from-ideal marriage, raises a child in that milieu, and works to manage elements of a life that can't be put back together. His story becomes somewhat of a parody of itself, even as he grows and struggles. And this life story—one filled with squandered potential—is an engaging one.

In the fun, adventure-filled novel *The Red-Headed Pilgrim* a young man embarks on a journey of self-discovery and struggles to find meaning as his bad decisions compound.

JEFF FLEISCHER (January / February 2023)

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