

The Stars of Locust Ridge

Craig Moody

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The Stars of Locust Ridge is an otherworldly novel about growing up and coming to terms with your family history.

In Craig Moody's engrossing coming-of-age story, *The Stars of Locust Ridge*, a young girl strives to uncover her family's secrets and is plagued by strange occurrences in the Tennessee hills.

Genevieve is a high school student living on her own. Her uncle watches over her from a nearby cabin while her absent mother puts work first. She is considered a loner and is ostracized at school for reasons unknown.

Genevieve mistakes lust for love when Kenneth, a handsome football-playing senior, expresses interest in her (much to the chagrin of Kenneth's parents and Genevieve's bullies). She lashes out at her biggest adversary but ends up expelled and pregnant, forced to finish school under the guidance of the principal.

Mysterious, pain-inducing night terrors and sleepwalking are a further challenge. A group of dancing stars appears in the night sky, making Genevieve question her sanity: is she alone, or is someone watching her? Through it all, Genevieve learns the importance of confiding in those you trust and of standing up for yourself. The novel works toward dark truths about Genevieve's dysfunctional family and her night terrors.

High school drama, the loss of innocence, and growing up are the novel's dominant themes. It places heavy emphasis on sex, sometimes to excess, cheapening the impact of Genevieve's burgeoning sexuality. The book's otherworldly elements often feel external to its conflicts; only late in the novel do the dancing stars and watchers in the woods have gravitas.

Though at the beginning Genevieve is self-absorbed and prone to rash decisions, she grows into a mature woman who knows her own mind and who stands firm in her decisions. She is shown learning from her mistakes and making an effort to surpass her challenges. Kenneth is less dimensional. He's selfish and sexist until the end, when he begins to develop past clichés.

Balancing between Genevieve's perspective and the story itself, the book progresses without breaks. Ellipses alone trigger pauses. The lack of definite breaks in the narrative results in an unsettling, forced progression with no clear place to stop.

Straightforward descriptions of Genevieve's environment—its nature, the town, and the people around her—make for lifelike scenes. Conversations make use of a Tennessee dialect, and the impact is immersive. The story line engages attention through developments that are both expected and surprising, though one family reveal is anticlimactic in comparison to its buildup.

With an authentic, time-stamped framework and otherworldly elements, *The Stars of Locust Ridge* is a novel about growing up and coming to terms with your family history.

ALEX DAILEY (November 25, 2019)

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