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Clarion Review ★★★★½ GENERAL FICTION

The Whirligig Dance

W.G. Palmer
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The 1960s was a turbulent decade in America. The innocence of the 1950s was lost with the Vietnam War, the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King Jr., and an increasing awareness of environmental problems. America was changing quickly. The Whirligig Dance is the story of Jeremy Van Hutton, whose coming of age during this period takes a sharp turn when he and his best friends are involved in a plane crash.

When Jeremy awakes after months of unconsciousness, he finds himself in a cabin deep in the wilderness under the care of an albino named Kendrick Watts. This shock is only the beginning. While he was sleeping, his best friend Bobby told authorities that Jeremy was responsible for the death of a woman in their home town. The story that follows is Jeremy's quest for justice, meaning, and his place in the world.

This is the third novel by author W.G. Palmer. He has created a beautiful story about finding peace and purpose in a world that can be full of negativity. Jeremy's maturation runs parallel to the maturation of American culture. Palmer describes Jeremy's reaction to his former college campus after his recovery: "Change was in the air, and although I didn't fully understand it, it suggested that maybe the fact that I'd undergone such a metamorphosis over the past year wasn't so unique after all." Interwoven with Jeremy's development is a philosophical exploration of the relationship between humans and the earth. Kendrick, who has chosen to live as a hermit, has devoted himself to taking care of the nearly sixty miles of land which make up his property, and he teaches Jeremy a great deal about stewardship. Though the reader may not agree with everything Kendrick believes or does, the arguments and ideals presented through him leave a great deal to think about.

The author has a florid writing style that can be exhausting for the reader. For instance, when Jeremy describes his first visit to a small island on Kendrick's property, he writes, "A flat-topped grayish-white boulder loaded with specks of mica that took on a jeweled effect in the rising sun spawned an innate attraction within me." However, if the reader can get beyond all of the descriptors, there is wisdom in this book. Overall, this novel is well developed, with an interesting cast of characters and a strong sense of time and place.

CATHERINE THURESON (July 1, 2010)

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