



Watkins Glen

Eleanor Lerman

Mayapple Press (Jun 21, 2021)

Hardcover \$22.95 (220pp)

978-1-952781-01-8

In Eleanor Lerman's resonant novel *Watkins Glen*, an estranged brother and sister reunite to deal with illness, aging, and memories.

Susan and her older brother, Mark, led very different lives. Still a free spirit in her sixties, Susan often thinks of herself as rootless. When she receives a call about Mark's unusual behavior, she drives to his Brooklyn apartment. Mark, a retired teacher, is now obsessed with painting strange portraits and landscapes. He has Alzheimer's disease, and his compulsion is attributable to Acquired Savant Syndrome.

Susan lives upstate, near Watkins Glen, a rural tourist town that hosts auto racing events. It's a town that's peopled with quirky characters, including Grateful Dead-loving Marlee, who owns a gift shop, and Ted, the "one-man taxi," who shuttles around in his dilapidated Honda. Susan and Mark spent their childhood vacations there while their father, Dave, took part in the local drag racing subculture. Liberated from the family upholstery business, Dave drove with "animal energy" to escape his urban existence.

The novel's beautiful arcs of prose include Susan's recollection of her father's racing adventures, as of his car rushing into a night that "sparkled with stars and fireflies and cigarette embers." Susan and Mark's idyllic summers are also contrasted with their present life, as the region's fierce winter brings frozen lakes, snow, and "icicle teeth." Once Susan becomes Mark's caretaker, she struggles with the responsibility at times, trying to manage her own life as well as Mark's erratic behavior. However, as "one old runaway daughter and an even older math teacher with a terrible affliction," they confront an uncertain future with humor, leaning on their unique bond.

With its surety of setting and reflective candor, *Watkins Glen* is a distinct, intricate novel that avoids sentimentality in favor of a compassionate tone.

MEG NOLA (May / June 2021)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.