

Geographies of the Heart

Caitlin Hamilton Summie

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Eldercare, mourning, and the heartening anchor that comes from retelling personal stories infuse Caitlin Hamilton Summie's *Geographies of the Heart*, a tender novel-in-stories about a multigenerational Minnesotan family.

A recent college graduate, Sarah is jobless. She attends to her grandparents, Catherine and Ed, who reside in a nursing home. Al, who in time becomes her husband, pitches in, too. And Glennie, Sarah's younger sister, is an aspiring doctor who's estranged from her family because of her commitment to work; she provokes concerns among her relatives.

Through interconnected and looping tales, the book spans years. It covers Sarah's marriage; Al's friendship with Ed and Ed's veteran cohorts, whose wartime memories reveal a pact based on love and silence; a neighborhood tornado; and anticipation about the birth of Sarah's daughter. Throughout, people's fears around loss mix with quiet attentiveness toward other people's needs—and the all-too-human awareness that when love is stretched thin by duty, it leads to unintended pain.

Sensitive self-reflections are used to navigate the cast's Midwestern reticence. There are rare but rewarding instances in which people allow themselves to share each other's burdens. Al's contentions with grief when he's faced with his neighbors' medical crisis are eloquent, as is the treatment that's given to the accidental death of a troubled child. Adulthood is revealed to be isolating and lonely, but the treatment of it is poignant, and neighborliness alleviates it. And the coverage of Sarah and Glennie's gradual rift is resounding, as is their ability to bridge their differences with help.

In its subdued, mature depiction of love and sisterhood, which both endure through setbacks, *Geographies of the Heart* is a piercing novel populated by absorbing legacies and instances of forgiveness.

KAREN RIGBY (January / February 2022)

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