



INDEPENDENT BOOK REVIEW

A CELEBRATION OF SMALL PRESS AND SELF-PUBLISHED BOOKS



Jayne and the Average North Dakotan

by Chandler Myer

Genre: Fiction / LGBTQ+ / Humor

Reviewed by Erica Ball

Equal parts sweet and sarcastic, a hilarious story of the growing pains that come with discovering your true self

Jayne and the Average North Dakotan is the story of thirty-something Randy, a buttoned-up accountant embarking on the biggest adventure of his life: leaving his small town and moving to Washington D.C. in search of community.

Randy was raised by older parents who simply integrated him into their lives. He happily followed their ways and is used to a quiet routine of microwaved food, tv, and work. But he knows he wants more from life, so one day he takes a step into another world, and before he knows it, he is swept up in a whirlwind of drag queens, drama, drinks, and debauchery.

His foul-mouthed guide in this new world is Jayne Mansfield, a toweringly tall, exquisitely coiffed drag queen he meets at a bar. Jayne barges into his life, appoints herself his “fairy godmother,” and refuses to leave until she feels her work is complete—her work being setting Randy up in his new life in Washington’s gay community. Jayne’s method is a highly abrasive form of tough love, and she quickly breaks down all of Randy’s carefully constructed walls. Jayne is merciless in her mission to help Randy find himself—often despite himself.

Jayne’s motives for helping are as mysterious as Jayne herself, and Randy begins to realize he never sees her out of drag. What she does all day and whether she has a job or apartment of her own are all questions that start to bother him as the weeks go on. The ease with which Randy accepts Jayne’s complete intrusions on his privacy is an

intriguing character trait. It takes a while for Randy to work up the guts and emotion to confront Jayne on her behavior and get to the bottom of things.

A truly unpredictable and spectacular character, Jayne is a brilliant counterpoint to Randy's stick-in-the-mud ways. Though their conversations at times feel like two people speaking different languages, they still come to a kind of understanding on a nonverbal level. As could be predicted from the title, the heart and soul of the book is Jayne and Randy's relationship.

It is gratifying to watch Randy's sometimes painfully slow progress in growing up and making a life for himself. There are many unfortunate and embarrassing moments, but also ones of triumph and self-fulfillment.

Some readers may wish we followed Randy on his journey a little further, as it seems this is only the beginning for him. Others may find this adds to the realism, as such changes can take years of conscious effort, and don't necessarily fit into a tidy plot.

This book is highly recommended for readers who love camp, sarcasm, a good roasting—and of course drag. Though there are scenes containing sexual content, and others with frank descriptions of different bodily functions, the author's deft handling of them mean they come off as more hilarious than cringy.

In the end, the story of Randy and Jayne is about getting help from unexpected places. It is about how hard it can be to break out of shells—and comfort zones—and look honestly at what to hold on to and to let go of. It's also a story of watching what you wish for.