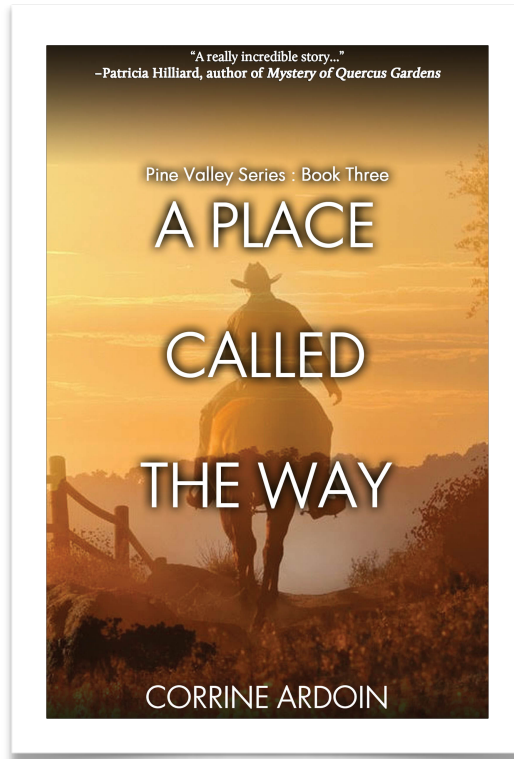




“Book Review: *A Place Called the Way*”

Reviewed by Samantha Hui



***A Place Called the Way* draws tenderness and truth from a fictional small town.**

“The Way is what connects us all, one heart, one soul, one life, all One.”

Corrine Ardoin delivers another captivating story with *A Place Called the Way*, the third book in the Pine Valley series. Drawing upon the stories we’ve already encountered in the previous books, this novel delves deeper into the characters’ trials and provides insight



into the fictional history of their little town. This third book sustains all the intrigue and compassion of the previous books.

“He stopped, because he felt himself stepping into a place where he was afraid to go, a place of truth and terror, of beauty and ugliness.”

This book has a beautiful way of depicting the multitude of personalities in small town life. Although the book jumps around, following the perspectives of quite a number of characters living in Pine Valley, the story most intimately follows the Hart family, specifically Little Jimmy. We are taken through the life of Little Jimmy from the abuse he suffered at the hands of his “Mean Uncle” well into his adulthood and the results of the abuse. Whereas Little Jimmy was more of a side character in previous books, in *A Place Called the Way*, we see Little Jimmy as a complete, rounded individual.

“Jim left the house with his shadow so close, it likely adhered itself to his back. He could not escape it. What lived within himself clung to the fabric of his soul, reaching and grasping.”

Alongside the story of Little Jimmy’s coming of age is a story about how Pine Valley got its name of Pine Way, or the Way. A part of the story of the significance of the name comes down to a fight between a stranger to the town, Josiah Hart, a former Confederate soldier, and Henry Henry who dubbed Pine Valley “The Way.” The story is rife with drama, death, and hope.

“Since the war ended, parents were confronted with things their own parents never experienced. It was a different era. Children were different, expecting things from life their parents had no idea how to provide. Situations were different.”

The general message of the book is mirrored in its narrative style. The series takes on the form of verbal histories. Characters are introduced only where appropriate and stay around for as long as they are narratively needed. Ardoin has written characters who are fully fleshed out in the sense that we as readers encounter people every day, either briefly or for a long time; we have no way of accessing their backstories, but we can know them enough to cherish them.



“The valley’s one-hundred years of history was not only about buildings and roads or storekeepers and postmasters. Tales filled the evenings around backyard barbecues. Memories were shared while hair styling in the beauty parlor. Funny stories were told around a scrap album where photos brought loved ones near.”

One of the strengths of this book is that it refrains from teaching any overt lessons. Characters like Jimmy and his mother Candelaria must grapple with the subtle and explicit racisms in town because they are Hispanic, but racism is not the central focus of the book. The general theme of the books is that “life carries on” in spite of all its trauma and in spite of all its beauty. In the same way the narrative passes from one character to another, life and death are unrelenting and will continue on whether you’re there or not.

“It always came down to this, he surmised, that if Edenville was a town too small for secrets, Pine Way was a town too small even for privacy.”

A Place Called the Way is subtle, intriguing, and filled with hope. This is a beautiful story about how small town life can consume you whole or help you flourish. Ardoin’s writing will have you sympathizing deeply with the characters’ missed opportunities and tasks uncompleted. What an excellent addition to Ardoin’s Pine Valley series for returning and new readers alike.