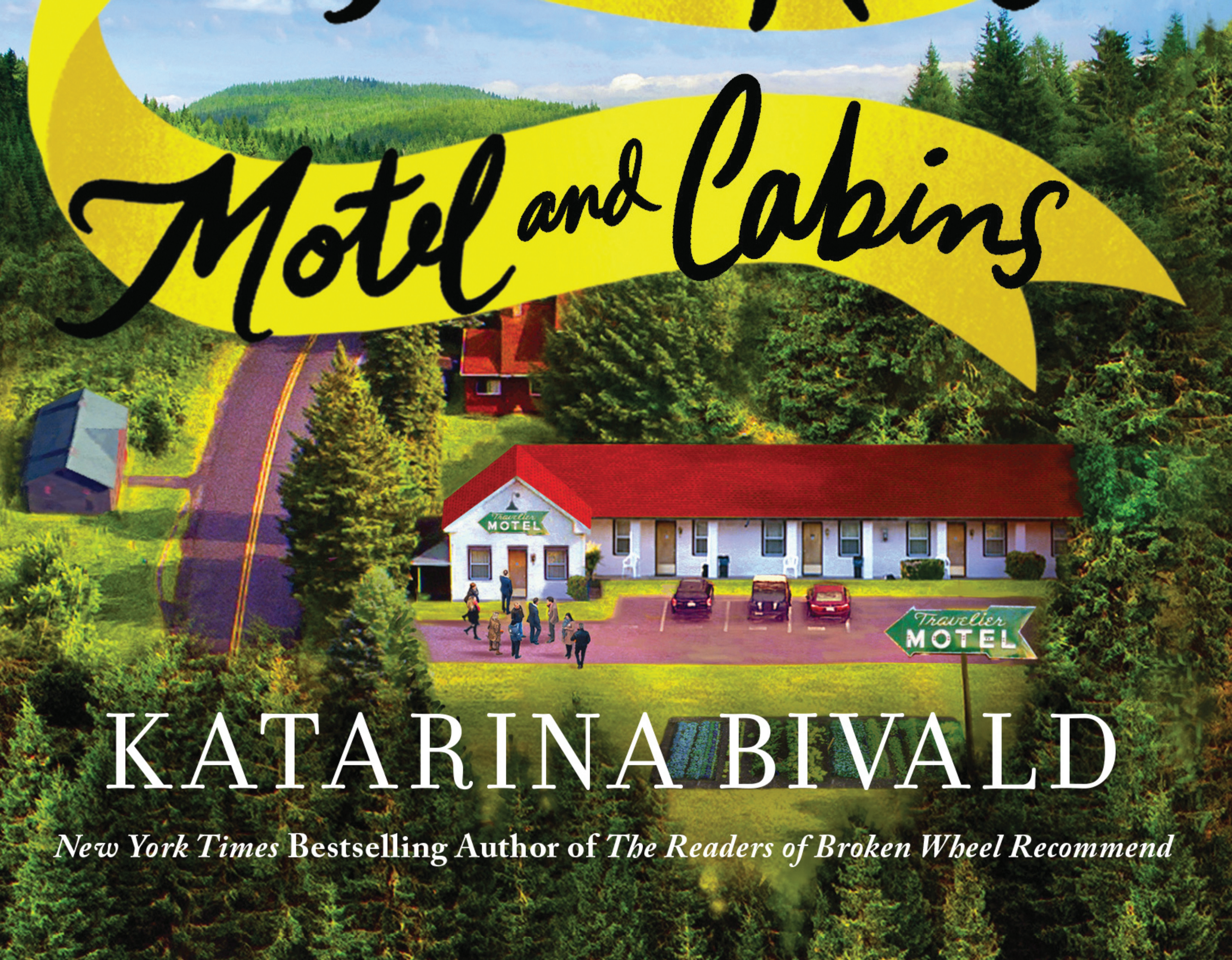


“One of these books you want to live in for a while.”
—NINA GEORGE, *New York Times* bestselling author of
The Little Paris Bookshop, for *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend*

Welcome to the Pine Away Motel and Cabins



KATARINA BIVALD

New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend*

Reading Group Guide

1. Describe the relationship between Henny, Camila, MacKenzie, and Michael. Would you want to be friends with them? Who was your favorite?
2. Talk about the influence of social media in this book. How did it help the motel? In what ways did social media harm it?
3. Many people in the town claim that they don't hate gay people, but they never speak up in defense of MacKenzie, Camila, or the motel. Does their silence inflict damage? In what way?
4. Discuss Robert, Henny's dad. What is he like? How does he change by the end of the book?
5. Pine Creek is a small town where everyone knows everyone else. Would you, like Henny, want to stay in a place like that? Or would you, like Michael, want to leave?
6. Pine Creek is host to a quirky cast of characters. Did you have a favorite towns person? Why?
7. You can learn a lot about a person by looking at the people who love them. After reading about MacKenzie, Dolores, Buddy, Alejandro, Camila, and Michael, just to name a few, what did you learn about Henny?

8. As a ghost, Henny tries to influence the people around her by whispering to them. Do you think her efforts work, or do her friends save the day on their own?
9. Talk a little about Stacey and Robert's friendship. How do they help each other?
10. MacKenzie spends her life in a town that unfairly condemns her identity. Why do you think she stays? What would you do?
11. Describe why it was so difficult for Camila to return to Pine Creek. What obstacles did she face? How did she overcome them?
12. How did you feel about Henny staying behind at the Pine Away Motel at the end of the story? Did it strike you as sad?
13. Do you think the town will be able to put aside its differences after Henny's memorial? Why or why not?
14. What do you think happens to Henny after the story ends? Does she stay in Pine Creek? Does she move on?

A Conversation with the Author

Tell us a little bit about your writing process.

The first thing to mark a new project is when I get a sense of at least one of the characters, often the main one. This usually comes to me in a series of scenes or situations, even though they don't always end up in the book. In *Welcome to the Pine Away Motel and Cabins*, it was Henny standing alone by the road, looking down at her own body and realizing that something was wrong here. From that moment, Henny walked by my side as a very friendly ghost. I've doubted a lot of things with this book—at times it was a difficult and challenging book to write—but I've never doubted Henny.

Your first book, *The Readers of Broken Wheel Recommend*, also takes place in a small town. What is it about these communities that makes you want to use them as settings for your stories?

I think small towns are like a microcosm of human life. People are closer here—literally, geographically—so they offer a great way to show how different and quirky or downright crazy we all often are. I think small town also forces you to meet people who are different from you, which is always a great thing in a novel—and in real life.

This book takes on some serious political issues—namely, the right-wing media and the widespread prejudice against the LGBTQ community. Why did you decide to write a story about these conflicts?

I am bisexual myself, and I have LGBTQ friends from Oregon. When I began writing this book, I was worried about the increasingly vocal and violent racist movement and the rise of homophobia and transphobia.

And at its core, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia all lead to people having to justify their right to live and love and exist. And never is this clearer than in elections, when you basically have to campaign for your right to exist—especially if the topic is literally you. It does something to you, having to convince your neighbor or coworker or family member that you are a human being.

What inspired you to write a protagonist who, as a ghost, is present but unseen by the rest of the primary characters? Was it difficult writing a character like this?

I think there are two kinds of people in this world: those who like the idea of being a ghost, and those who are terrified of it. I'm very much in the first category. The idea of not existing is much more frightening than any of the, well, practical difficulties that being a ghost entail. So this book began as the simple question about what it would be like if I did die and remained as a ghost. When Henny and MacKenzie arrived, it turned into a much deeper story about love, friendship, and community. Henny is simply a better, braver person than I am.

Do you feel that not having been raised in the U.S. offers you a clearer perspective on American issues?

No, not really. You have a deeper understanding of a place if you've lived there all your life. But maybe it offers me a different approach to them at least: if I don't understand something, I have to look deeper into it.

Out of all the quirky characters who inhabit this story, which was your favorite to write?

I love them all. Cheryl was perhaps the one I struggled most with to understand and accept, and therefore, she's come to mean a lot to me, even though her approach to God is very different from my own. And I have a special soft spot for Clarence and Buddy.

What kind of books are you reading these days?

I've read a lot of books about death and dying lately. They can teach

you a lot about life. I recommend everyone read Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler's *Life Lessons*.

What made you choose to have this narrative revolve around a motel?

It's an irresistible setting for a novel. Anything can happen at a motel. I think we all know this.

Through their friendships with Henny, the characters in this book learn how to be better, happier people. Did you learn anything from her?

For years, Henny has walked by my side as a very friendly ghost. She has represented everything that is most brave and loving. She might not have led a very exciting life, but she's a better person than I'll ever be. So yes, I have learned a lot from her and continue to do so. I think we all need someone to remind us about what's important in life. It's a lesson that's so tragically easy to forget in the general humdrum of existence.

Were there parts of the story that were difficult to write? Which ones?

As a Christian, I still struggle to understand how someone could take the love of Jesus and use it as a weapon against people, especially vulnerable people who should instead inspire our help and compassion. What's most difficult for me to accept is that these are often also people who *are* loving and compassionate and helpful, in a far greater way than I am, for example. They just seem to be able to draw, in their mind, a sharp line between those who deserve help and those who don't—and to combine this limit to their compassion with being a Christian, which is incomprehensible to me.

At the end of the book, the town overcomes its differences by celebrating Henny's life. Do you think this same principle can be applied to conflict in real life?

I sincerely hope so, or else I see little hope for us. But yes, I do think so. I think each generation has the potential to create the world anew. Even if many of the old battles need to be fought again and again and

again, I have to remind myself that we've done it before, we can do it again, and we're better prepared for it now. And that I think all human beings have the capacity to learn, love, and grow.

What do you hope readers will ultimately take away from Henny's story?

That to set limits to our communities belittles us all. It's not enough to love only our closest friends and family or congregation; we're bigger and braver than that. If there's one thing I want readers to take with them from Henny is how great our ability to love is.