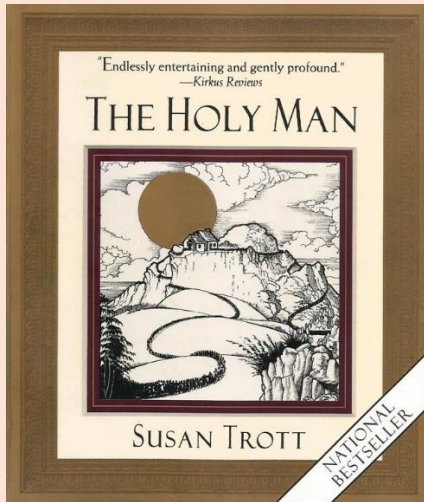


James Hutchison Recommended Reading

The Holy Man by Susan Trott

Posted on October 5, 2015



Who hasn't faced dark times? And when you're facing dark times a lot of people have a favourite song or a book or a movie that they turn to. If you do, it's because there's something about that story that resonates. There's something about that story that helps restore your balance and helps you get on with life.

For me, one of those books is *The Holy Man* by Susan Trott. I discovered this little gem in the discount rack at the Coles Book Store in the North Hill Mall one afternoon twenty or so years ago. I have read this little book on many occasions when my spirits have needed a lift.

The Holy Man is based on one of my favourite Zen stories about – you guessed it – a holy man. A holy man living on a mountain in a hermitage. I won't tell you the Zen story here because that's part of the book and I don't want to spoil the surprise. Yes, there is a surprise. Or certainly a lesson. Many lessons, in fact. After all, Zen stories are meant to teach us something

about life and this little book is certainly an examination of life.

The cast of characters includes thousands of pilgrims who line up each summer to see the Holy Man. There are also seven monks who live at the hermitage. And of course, there is the holy man himself.

Each pilgrim comes to the mountain seeking answers about some aspect of his or her life. There's the angry man, the drunkard, and the killer amongst others. Trott examines addiction, vanity, and jealousy through each character's quest. But one of the things I like most about the book is the fact that not everyone comes away having learned his or her lesson. Some remain as deluded and unenlightened as when they started their journey.

I always come away from reading the holy man with a sense of gratitude. That whatever troubles I face in life, I have a choice about how to live my life. I can be grateful and appreciate each day or I can be blind to the blessings that each day brings. And what I have learned is that blessings come in many forms. Often our troubles and battles are the things which help to form our character. Life is about learning how to live with failure and defeat not just victory and success.

So, if you're in need of some inspiration or just a fun and delightful read check out *The Holy Man* by Susan Trott.

James Hutchison is a playwright who writes comedies, dramas, and mysteries. He also interviews other playwrights, actors, and directors about the business and creative aspects of theatre, film, and television.

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