



Aesthetica

Allie Rowbottom

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A former influencer reminisces about her days chasing power and internet fame in Allie Rowbottom's subtle novel *Aesthetica*.

At nineteen, Anna wanted to be an internet model. Her plan was to find a manager, grow her social media following, and make enough money to support herself and her mother. As her plans came to fruition though, she discovered that compromises are made on the other side of the camera. She was forced to bury secrets.

Now, in a pink hotel in California, Anna lounges by the pool, watching a family swim. Focusing on them takes her mind off her looming experimental procedure to reverse the plastic surgery she had when she was younger. She is unsuccessful, and long repressed memories resurface.

Anna's thoughts, emotions, and memories are the filter through which all is understood. Unlike a social media filter, meant to obscure flaws, the narrative neither shies away from Anna's thirst for fame nor allows her to blur the edges of her more destructive choices. Instead, it brings into sharp focus her conflicting feelings about undergoing surgery, which she must convince herself she wants; her fraught relationship with her mother; and her too late realization about the consequences of her work.

Anna's past and present collide as she scrolls through her old photographs. Past Anna, a naïve teenager, was on a slow spiral into the dark side of social media. Present Anna, a dissatisfied adult, does just enough to stay afloat, moving neither forward nor backward; her fervent wish is to return to a time when she felt full of herself and powerful. The connection between the two versions of Anna is just out of reach.

Aesthetica is an introspective novel wherein fame is fleeting and power must come from within.

DONTANÁ MCPHERSON-JOSEPH (November / December 2022)

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