

All the Tiny Beauties

Jenn Scott

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Set in California, Jenn Scott's novel *All the Tiny Beauties* is a multigenerational story of love and survival.

Since he was young, Webb struggled, time and again, to fill the imposed social rituals of “manliness.” Scared to be himself, his life is filled with regret: he believes that he has been a poor son, father, lover, and friend. Now, just as Webb explores what it’s like to dress as a woman, the women in his life are also searching for themselves. But unhappiness follows Webb and others as they weave webs of lies. None of them are able to be content without admitting to their true selves, and each of their lives is made up of many parts.

The chapters have changing viewpoints and are insightful, if their timelines are somewhat convoluted. Webb's repeated inability to be himself impacts others in his life, too, including his daughter, Debra, whom he doesn't see after she is twelve years old, and Hannah, a young woman who is hired to be his caretaker. These women's backstories are essential to the book, but they're split between tangled accounts from 1941 and 2001. Eruptions of divorce and neglect arise as surprises.

When Debra narrates, she speaks with hope that contrasts with Webb's need for survival. Because he exists in a state of being sad and scared, his identity is often best expressed within the stories of the women in his life.

All the Tiny Beauties is a careful, beautiful literary novel that ponders the contents of happiness and the purpose with which people lead their lives. By questioning what it means to conform to gender and social roles, it makes a deep investment in the multiplicity of identities.

ADDISSYN HOUSE (September / October 2022)

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