FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Literary

Beauties
Mary Troy
BkMk Press University of Missouri-Kansas City
978-1-886157-74-3
(October 31, 2010)

Young and mature women alike wonder whether their lives would have been different if they possessed or lacked beauty. In *Beauties*, a novel by Mary Troy, this question is explored. Yet her examination of the power, scope, and mere presence of beauty digs deeper than exterior appearance: she takes on the internal landscape as well in the lives of two very different cousins.

Indeed, *Beauties* is a complex story of family, self-esteem, and romance (of sorts) alternately chaptered in the voices of two women who are diametrically physical opposites. Shelly is a mid-thirties divorcée whose beauty has compelled her to take part in one beauty contest after another over the years. She has recently moved in with her cousin Bev to help run a foundering new diner in a bad part of town. Bev, owner of the restaurant, was born with a catalogue of birth defects which include malformed legs, hands, and face. Cushioned by settlement money Bev was awarded for her condition, the two women struggle with each other and the outside world for primacy, identity, and success.

Troy's story could stop there, and remain a "buddy drama" that did little but juxtapose the foibles of one of nature's Chosen, and one of nature's Mistakes. Yet Troy deftly sidesteps the obvious conceit for the deeper human story again and again. First of all, the two women are not brought together by the caprices of fate: They are brought together through their own very real flaws and varying abilities to relate to each other and the rest of the world. For instance, it may be Sherry's inability to form a relationship not predicated on her legendary looks that has brought her to her current state in life. In the case of the un-pretty and curmudgeonly Bev, her past and present unwillingness to interact with the normal human world on its own terms has shaped her life. The struggling diner becomes their personal redoubt from the world at large.

But if it is their presentation to the world on visual terms that defines their perceptions of themselves, it is Troy's delicate treatment of their interiors that define them to the reader. In particular, their relationships to men, and ultimately, to one another, take this novel into a

complex, lyrical territory that flirts with greatness. An audience seeking a stately, involved read about human relationships and the meaning of beauty—in all its forms will enjoy this beauty of a novel.

Leia Menlove