

Cascade Falls: A Novel

Bruce Ferber

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This novel is a sincere exploration of the struggles people go through trying to survive and do right, while still holding on to their dreams.

Maya and Danny Johnson have all but given up on their dreams. After a decade of scraping together rent, battling the odds against success in the art world—she as a painter, he as a playwright—and trying to raise two kids in a cramped LA apartment on his substitute-teaching salary, the couple finally decide they can't continue pursuing the bohemian life they had in mind. They move to Phoenix, and at the start of Bruce Ferber's second novel, *Cascade Falls*, Danny is being groomed to take over his father's home-building company, Johnson Communities, while Maya is a full-time mother raising their kids in one of her father-in-law's master planned developments. But there's nothing like the barren landscape and oppressive heat of a suburban Phoenix summer to make clear just how empty and unpromising life has become.

Danny and Maya quickly find themselves desperate for change once again. It's of a different sort this time, born not from rejection or financial hardship but from isolation and compromise. It's only a matter of time before someone breaks or escapes.

Johnson Communities runs the lives of almost every character in this story, and Danny's domineering father, Ted Johnson, sits at the center of that web. Ferber's narrative focuses on Danny and Maya, while also touching on the troubles of a few beleaguered company employees, Ted's sacrificing wife, and a self-serving writer brought in to document Ted's rise to success. There are waitresses and widowers; there is temptation and self-doubt. Only a few really enjoy much freedom or power. But in his conflicts, Ferber is wise not to assign too much blame. Even as marriages falter and people lash out, he doesn't take the easy way out with oversimplified categories of good guys and bad.

Cascade Falls is about loss: lost dreams, lost love, lost money. But it's also a story about rising from the ashes, just as the setting suggests, and redemption through honesty and forgiveness.

JENNIFER WILLIAMS (Spring 2015)

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