



Daddy Boy

Emerson Whitney

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In nuanced, swirling prose, Emerson Whitney's gutsy memoir *Daddy Boy* takes a complex route through kink, trans identity, and storm chasing to locate their past, present, and future selves.

Switching between Whitney's often-displaced childhood, early adulthood as the submissive partner to a professional dominatrix, and a breakup that led to a two-week storm-chasing road trip in a van full of strangers, the book treats figures and landscapes as swift, elegant turning points. Passing back and forth across state lines, the van chases down promising storms that dissipate one after another.

The book's passages brim with images of bruised clouds and a familiar sense of seeking and not finding. The boundaries between the landscape and Whitney's emotion blur, becoming an impressionistic collage. And while witnessing beauty, Whitney hot wires their experiences to intellectual inquiry, discussing art and academic texts. The connections between masculinity and mastery are considered in depth, along with the freedom from responsibility that's offered by a submissive's role.

The story zigzags between times and places; juxtapositions of scenes from Whitney's childhood and young adulthood pile up and accumulate meaning. Meanwhile, Whitney engages in the shadow work of reconciling the gruff certainty of youth with the wiser uncertainty of maturity—wondering, after a flood of devastating childhood memories, “Does everyone's childhood wash them like this?” Quick shifts into moment-by-moment scenes slow the story down, as do a number of single-line paragraphs followed by white space to encourage a pause. Great depths are plumbed; memories and explorations of how the “belonging and disbelonging” that Whitney first experienced as a child dissipate and reform thanks to decades of experiences.

Filled with incisive cultural analyses, *Daddy Boy* is a powerful, vulnerable memoir about deep self-discovery.

MICHELE SHARPE (May / June 2023)

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