

Little Ships

Sandra Scofield

Wellstone Press

(352pp)

978-1-930835-31-3

Grandmothers' lives change when they gather to care for their grieving family members in the moving novel Little Ships.

Grief has an illuminating effect in Sandra Scofield's affecting multigenerational novel *Little Ships*.

After Eleanor's daughter-in-law, Karin, dies from a sudden illness, Eleanor and Helve, Karin's widowed Swedish emigrant mother, join forces to help Eleanor's stunned son, Nick, raise his daughters, Tilde and Juni. They help to break the news to the girls; they assist with clearing out Nick's apartment; they are supportive at Karin's burial ceremony. At a gradual rate, they learn to mix their grief-inflected responses with their everyday challenges (as with helping Tilde and Juni, who were previously homeschooled, adapt to the challenges of attending middle school).

In their efficient leadership, Eleanor and Helve center the book. They are developed in terms of their perceptive insights into other people's needs and the actions that they take to alleviate such concerns. And beyond their strength, they are humanized by their irrational fears, as when they worry about which side of her family Juni prefers.

Though they are a sometimes hesitant pair, straining to find qualities in common beyond their love for Tilde and Juni, the women complement each other well. Helve is a fatigued but stalwart companion to Eleanor, who—in addition to her family's loss—contends with her strained marriage to Walter, with whom she hopes to reconcile despite their miscommunications; in a secondary storyline they fumble through midlife together but are still tender toward each other because of their shared history. Less complementary to this tale of healing is a discursion to problems within Eleanor's adult daughter's marriage.

This is an introspective story that handles domestic conflicts in a subtle, languid manner. Amid the practical challenges of realigning households and acclimating to new circumstances, the cast's emotional interiors are prioritized. Their personal histories are shown to inform their present reactions. Still, their individual growth is incremental—in part because they are all numbed by grief, and in part because they are slow to realize how little they truly know about one another. Even Karin is shrouded in mysteries, having made inexplicable, expensive jewelry purchases that are used to imply secret impulses and debts. And as harsh facts about Nick and Karin's marriage are disclosed, Eleanor gains fresh perspective on her son's shortcomings. In time, boundaries are reestablished and new beginnings are approached, resulting in realistic closure.

In the moving novel *Little Ships*, a family grieves and recovers together, their relationships deepening because of their periods of hardship.

KAREN RIGBY (March 5, 2024)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. Foreword Reviews and Clarion Reviews make no guarantee that the publisher will receive a positive review. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.