

One Dirty Tree

Noah Van Sciver

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Noah Van Sciver reflects on his unusual upbringing and its effects on his life in the memoir *One Dirty Tree*. The book's title stems from the dilapidated, unkempt house Van Sciver's family inhabited in the 1990s, whose address was 133 but which was better known, because of the twisted dead oak in the front yard, by the nickname "One Dirty Tree."

Van Sciver's mother was mostly unemployed, and his father was an unsuccessful lawyer who worked odd jobs to support his large Mormon family before finally leaving them. There are stunning examples of a less-than-ideal childhood throughout the book, but as gripping as these are, what elevates the book from a simple recounting of the past is the way Van Sciver ties those formative days to his current life, including his relationship with his girlfriend, Gwen.

The book flashes to Van Sciver as an adult in 2014 and to a more recent adult version overseeing the whole memoir. His memories, as with many memories, can sometimes seem disjointed or not central to the overall story arc. But Van Sciver takes seemingly random recollections, like a childhood conversation about being rich, and artfully ties them to his 2014 self's worries about money.

Van Sciver's drawings can be rough and raw at times—he even occasionally depicts his adult self as a kind of monster—but they're also intimate and effective, perfectly suited to reality-based tales. A quote by Aristotle begins the book: "Give me a child until he is 7 and I will show you the man." Honestly and artistically, *One Dirty Tree* demonstrates the truth of that aphorism.

PETER DABBENE (November/December 2018)

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