



Seen at Last

J. T. Tierney

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Seen at Last is a moving novel about a tempestuous midsentence, the process of coming out, and falling in love again.

A mother who is bereft of genuine care explores her same-sex attractions in J. T. Tierney's perceptive novel about adult relationships, *Seen at Last*.

Grace is a therapist who feels neglected in her marriage to Michael, a surgeon. Frustrated by their silent disconnection, she's left feeling vulnerable. Then Allie, a divorced coworker, shows Grace sympathy. Indeed, Allie sees Grace as an individual. Grace's long-denied attraction to women comes to the fore, and her early hesitation about pursuing Allie turns into passion. The familiar stages of infidelity gain complexity when Grace is obliged to weigh the costs of her self-denial and self-relegation to ill-fitting domestic roles.

The scenes toggle between Grace and Michael's encounters and the quaint Victorian house where Grace and Allie share a practice with other quirky therapists. At home, Michael communicates in transactional ways that have "calcified," and he fails to discern that Grace yearns for his presence. At work, a place that Grace views as her refuge, a few clients mirror some of her own problems, including around questioning their identities. Her astute counseling advice proves much tougher to apply to herself, though.

People's emotions are conveyed in the course of conversations where what is left unsaid has aching implications. Grace's inner landscape is sketched in terms of her ongoing loneliness, and the ruts that are etched into her days with Michael are thought provoking. Themes surrounding the quiet ways people prioritize their careers over each other emerge as the novel progresses. Grace's conversations with Allie are also insightful, if weighty with topics like women's invisible labor. Still, they ably reinforce Grace's opinions about what healthy partnerships should look like.

The prose is measured and reflective, excavating people's motivations in tandem with the process of Grace's personal awakening. Tension is generated by the question of whether her needs are valid or if she is being selfish. Couples' counseling and its aftermath are also handled in a candid way, with considerations of the rifts that form between married people and about their potential for growth. Michael also evolves in these scenes, coming to understand his role in his marital problems.

Indeed, the book's approach to its tough topics is multifaceted. Grace experiences heartbreak and turmoil in the wake of her hard decisions and is also forced to recognize how her desires compete with her children's. The seeming contradictions in her life are handled in a poignant manner. A few side plots, however, including about another character who is also coming out, prove distracting, adding further pressure to an already busy story.

As Grace and Allie's romance develops, they experience occasional unease about hiding; some graphic, overextended scenes slow its pace, too. Still, their rapport is clear and refreshing. Grace's solution is paced across months, resulting in a realistic, nuanced story about self-awareness and braving new challenges with hope.

In the provocative novel *Seen at Last*, a woman at a crossroads reexamines her marriage and future.

KAREN RIGBY (April 2, 2026)

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