

The Nature of Small Birds

Susie Finkbeiner

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In Susie Finkbeiner's touching novel *The Nature of Small Birds*, an unusual adoption shows that families don't have to be perfect in order to be loving.

In the first of three interconnected story lines, Linda marries into the Matthews family in the 1970s. She and her husband, Bruce, welcome a bossy young girl into the world; their life is filled with small ups and downs. Linda feels an intense need to have another baby, and the Vietnam War results in an opportunity to adopt a displaced child.

The second story line is set in the 1980s, and focuses on Linda's oldest daughter, Sonny, and her adopted sister, Mindy, as they come of age. It is lighthearted, following along as the girls mature and adjust to their changing family dynamic. Its thematic focus on growth and understanding relationships comes to the fore as Mindy balances fitting in with staying true to herself.

Later, the book zooms in on tenderhearted Bruce in 2013. He grapples with the challenges presented by his ailing parents and confronts his own mortality. It's a marked shift from his young wife and daughter's experiences—more concerned on late reflections on life and family. But Bruce and Linda also prepare to help Mindy search out information about her time as an uprooted child in Vietnam.

Though each of the story lines could stand alone, their combination is masterful, resulting in a balanced story that's rich with nuance and gentle emotions. As the book moves from considerations of personal identity and war to those of growth, the Matthews family learns, again and again, that life isn't perfect.

In the novel *The Nature of Small Birds*, a family deals with heartbreak, loss, joy, and healing across generations; their love and faith keeps them together.

JOHN M. MURRAY (July / August 2021)

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