



## Tiny Shoes Dancing and Other Stories

**Audrey Kalman**

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There is suffering somewhere in everyone's story. Audrey Kalman's *Tiny Shoes Dancing* is an exploration of the quiet simplicity that characterizes so much of our modern pain, shared in a series of vignettes touching on a range of human tragedy. Under Kalman's careful pen, oddly familiar characters, all of whom it's easy to feel like you've stood behind in line somewhere, become studies of the internal wounds we all carry as we attempt to live lives in relationship.

A gothic atmosphere hangs over *Tiny Shoes Dancing*, giving its stories of human disconnect the quality of cautionary tales. Almost every story in the collection ends on a gasping caesura, coming to a close just as the last heart-wrenching twist is revealed. While not easy on the nervous system, the collection does strike an intangible, universal chord. The duet of "Bad Luck with Cats" and "Dosed," about a woman's sudden death and her son dealing with the aftermath, beautifully illuminates the strain of existential exhaustion. "Before There Was a Benjamin" also stands out, offering a near-magical ending for the relatable weary mother at its center.

While the more jarring endings frequently land to great effect as well, it's easy to become numb to shock after the first few stories. "The Boy in the Window," for instance, which leaves its tragic secret until the last moment, is more frustrating than poignant in its conclusion. Other vignettes, such as the inner monologues of "So She Says" and "Pudding," seem almost incomplete, as if the author decided to include a few studies from her sketchbook.

*Tiny Shoes Dancing* isn't a collection of bedtime stories; it's a loving yet brutal examination of the shadows of disconnected relationships. Enjoy one at a time when you're ready for a wake-up call, preferably followed by a friendly cup of coffee and a recommitment to never taking the people in your life for granted.

JESSIE HORNESS (July/August 2018)

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