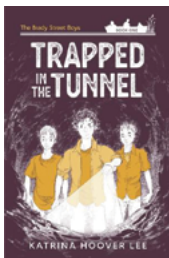


Trapped in the Tunnel

Lee, Katrina Hoover | Illus. by Josh Tufts
Self (222 pp.) | \$9.99 paper | July 7, 2021
9781735903538



Three young brothers endeavor to uncover the secret of the tunnels connecting their house to the one next door in Lee's middle-grade novel.

In 1987, the Fitzpatrick siblings' suburban neighborhood facilitates plenty of bicycling and athletic pursuits. Gary, the 13-year-old narrator, loves making lists, mediates between his bookish younger brother, Larry, and his klutzy older brother, Terry, and has a prosthetic leg as a result of cancer (he has been taught that people with disabilities, like him, "understand better how Jesus suffered on the cross"). Unsettled by the empty house next door and the men with "long, dirty hair" who have apparently begun squatting there, their mother, Arabella, plans to move the family to their relatives' farm in Iowa. The boys' parents, who advocate kindness to all mankind (and who may come across as somewhat aggressive in their religious zeal to some readers), give the boys an assignment to "learn about the fruit of the Spirit" over the summer, which involves mapping their loving actions on a chart each night at dinnertime. The boys discover that a house in their neighborhood may conceal a tunnel used by the Underground Railroad, which might have something to do with the men who have moved into the abandoned house and their cash-rich German neighbor. Very little discussion of the Underground Railroad's history emerges—it is evoked to explain the tunnel, and there are no Black characters. The book skews toward nostalgia and a vision of blissful American Christian homogeneity, but the characters do engage with issues of poverty and disability. The dialogue and prose are accessible for a

A wry, sensitive portrayal of the roiling turbulence of youth.

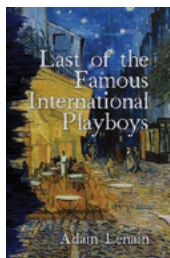
LAST OF THE FAMOUS INTERNATIONAL PLAYBOYS

middle-grade audience, while the tone recalls an earlier generation of Hardy Boys-style suburban mysteries for children. Tufts' delicate, brush-pen illustrations illuminate the book with images of the characters and settings in a 1980s style.

A retro-pastiche of suburban mystery that feels very nostalgic.

Last of the Famous International Playboys

Lenain, Adam | Christmas Lake Press
(328 pp.) | \$29.99 | \$19.99 paper
Sept. 4, 2023 | 9781737700074
9781960865120 paper



In this novel, a young man muddles through tragedy and euphoria as he attempts to understand his place in the world.

It's 1992 and Spencer Mazio has made a mess of things. As he tries to figure out how to wiggle out of his latest bout of trouble, the narrative jumps back to 1988, when he has arrived as a freshman at Yale University. Standing in line to sort out his overdue tuition payments, he meets Jonathon Vandershar III, an heir to a vast fortune who quickly takes Spencer under his wing and introduces him to drugs, booze, and the advantages of owning your own helicopter. Spencer was recruited by Yale to play on the baseball team but suffers from what he calls "the Dread," a darkness that rears its head as either depression or uncontrollable anger: "The Dread is a shape-shifty

thing made of shadow, so I never know what form it will take or what it might do to me." After starting a brawl on the baseball field during practice, Spencer finds himself in the Yale infirmary, where he meets the idealistic and upbeat John Henry. The two become fast friends, even as Spencer starts an illegal sports gambling ring that threatens his future at Yale and his job offer at Goldman Sachs. As the chapters toggle between the past and present, readers catch a glimpse of both the quiet times and momentous shifts—along with a memorable cast of characters, including Jonathon and John Henry, who slip in and out of Spencer's life—that help shape the protagonist. From a stay at the Widworth mental hospital and ill-fated affairs to a devastating betrayal and a tragic family history that he can't bring himself to share, Spencer struggles to find what—and who—will bring him true happiness.

Spencer's narration of his travails as a young man, veering between hopelessly depressing and delightfully sardonic moments, will likely remind some readers of a 1990s Holden Caulfield (complete with the occasional foul language). Spencer's observations about those around him can be surprisingly insightful: "A few years ago *Town & Country* dubbed them American Royalty, but as far as I could tell, the Vandershars were all just completely unreliable." But that kind of capacity makes it all the more frustrating in the frequent scenes in which he is unable to apply the gift to himself. Still, inability is what makes Spencer such a compelling narrator—his desperate attempt to escape childhood is one that will be familiar to many. The

A refreshing story that acknowledges that some people have more than one true love.

MY TWO AND ONLY

tale's dialogue flows at an impressive pace, with lightning-quick conversations broken up by enough muted observations by Spencer to slow it all down: "The whole town seemed vertical, rising up from a small yacht-filled harbor into wooded hills, and the buildings were all colored like the sherbets Papa and I used to eat when I was a kid—orange Creamsicle stacked on top of pink lemonade stacked on top of pomegranate sunrise stacked on top of lemon meringue." Lenain has crafted an emotional, well-balanced novel that ultimately reminds readers that everyone has an engaging story to tell.

A wry, sensitive portrayal of the roiling turbulence of youth in all its messiness.

My Two and Only

Malden, Carla | Rare Bird Books (212 pp.)
\$22.30 | Aug. 8, 2023 | 9781644283592



In Malden's novel, an interior designer and mother of two grapples with how to deal with the unexpected after her husband dies.

Life isn't always a fairy tale; most

of the time, it's far from it. Charlotte Most learns this lesson the hard way when she unexpectedly loses her husband, Paul, at the end of an unremarkable, errand-filled day. In the years that follow, Charlotte does the best that she can; she continues to raise her two children and takes on new clients for her interior design

business. But love remains one area of her life that remains stagnant—until a chance encounter at a fast-food drive-thru in which a tearful Charlotte crosses paths with Brian Novak, a divorced attorney. The two strike up a friendship after Brian, who was ahead of her in line, pays for Charlotte's food and adds a milkshake to her order, which leads to a friendly and revealing conversation. After a few years, the two begin dating, and everything's great until Brian proposes on the eve of the biggest moment of Charlotte's career; it forces her to reckon with whether she can move on without erasing Paul from her life. Malden's story is exceptionally well told, with descriptions that allow readers to fully immerse themselves in the Los Angeles setting: "People blasted the AC in their homes; stoplights were out all over town, victim to grid overload. At some intersections, traffic cops waved cars through—two, three, maybe four at a time. Others were left unguarded, daring drivers to figure it out for themselves: no red, no yellow, no green." The author also captures emotions expertly; as a result, readers will grow close to Charlotte as her story unfolds. The novel is engaging throughout, and readers will likely wish for more from the author.

A refreshing story that acknowledges that some people have more than one true love.



For more Indie content, visit Kirkus online.

Salmon, Cedar, Rock & Rain: Washington's Olympic Peninsula

McNulty, Tim | Mountaineers Books (208 pp.) | \$32.95 | Oct. 1, 2023 | 9781680515299



McNulty explores the past, present, and future of Washington's Olympic Peninsula in this nonfiction work.

The state of Washington's Olympic Peninsula is a land rich in beauty and biodiversity. Anchored by Olympic National Park and containing Hoh, one of the United States' last remaining rain forests, the area was once seen as the country's last frontier, a wilderness that called to eccentrics, lush and full of life but paradoxically gloomy and claustrophobic. A rousing array of photos from numerous photographers captures the region's rigid cliffs and curved rocky capes, moist seabeds and glistening-yet-muddy beaches, moss-covered trees and tangled roots, and the diverse species of fish, birds, and other fauna that call it all home. Global warming has affected the Olympic Peninsula; the salmon no longer return in the numbers they once did, and the Anderson Glacier is now Moraine Lake. Additional essays, many by Indigenous residents, recall the history and sacred places of the Klallam and S'Kallam tribes, the songs and legends of the Makah peoples, and the close relationships of the Quileute, Hoh, and Quinault tribes with the rivers and ocean ("The halibut spirit, for example, could make fish come to the shore so that all of the village could acquire them"). The book's gorgeous color photographs are easy to get lost in, but they become quite sobering when considered in the context of climate change's impacts. Recent efforts to remedy the multigenerational trauma inflicted by white settlers on the Indigenous peoples (and other ill effects of meddling in the region) offer hope that the area's decline need not be