

The London Train



Not many novels tell the story of a daughter's pregnancy through her father's eyes, and although this is only one of this book's themes, it's very powerful one. In the first half, we follow the story of the very imperfect Paul--critic, college teacher, husband, father, friend, and neighbor who is involved in a feud over the cutting down of trees. Paul himself admits that he has problems, for example, he's too afraid of showing emotion so he does not ask the undertaker to see his mother's body. He lies to his wife, has affairs, and for years has ignored his oldest child.

But now she is 19, in the family way, and amazingly she chooses to tell him this secret and not his ex-wife. But he must promise not to share it with anyone until Pia says it's OK. He leaves Cardiff, Wales, where he shares a home with his second wife, Elise, and boards the train for London where Pia lives. Each time, he tells another untruth and this convinces Elise that he is fooling around again.

Eventually, after a major argument with Elise, Paul moves in with his daughter, her Polish boyfriend and his very attractive sister. Living in their unkempt, cheap apartment in central London, makes Paul remember the freedom of his philosophical, nonmaterialistic youth, and he wants those days back again.

The second major story is about Cora, a childless woman, who leaves her husband. She returns to Wales to the house she inherited from her parents and embarks on a love affair. However, when her husband, an important civil servant, disappears she is drawn back into the nexus of his family. Both these story threads connect on the London train.

Tessa Hadley is a very accomplished writer. She describes characters and places vividly, but her main strength is untangling the knots of relationships and showing how they bring both joy and sorrow to people. She never skims the surface of life. Her characters discuss philosophy, art, books, and goals. After reading one, you feel as though you've had a great conversation with an intelligent, caring friend.

For a nonfiction look at daughters and dads, check out Linda Nielsen's Between Fathers & Daughters: Enriching and Rebuilding Your Adult Relationship ..

Posted by Dory L. on September 19, 2011

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