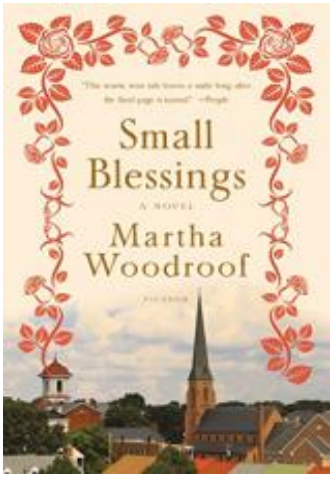
Small Blessings

by Martha Woodroof



About the Book

Tom Putnam has resigned himself to a quiet and half-fulfilled life. An English professor in a sleepy college town, he spends his days browsing the Shakespeare shelves at the campus bookstore, managing the oddball faculty in his department and caring, alongside his formidable mother-in-law, for his wife Marjory, a fragile shut-in with unrelenting neuroses, a condition exacerbated by her discovery of Tom?s brief and misguided affair with a visiting poetess a decade earlier.

Then, one evening at the bookstore, Tom and Marjory meet Rose Callahan, the shop's charming new hire, and Marjory invites Rose to their home for dinner, out of the blue, her first social interaction since her breakdown. Tom wonders if it?s a sign that change is on the horizon, a feeling confirmed upon his return home, where he opens a letter from his former paramour, informing him he'd fathered a son who is heading Tom's way on a train. His mind races at the possibility of having a family after so many years of loneliness. And it becomes clear change is coming whether Tom is ready or not.

A heartwarming story with a charmingly imperfect cast of characters to cheer for, SMALL BLESSINGS has a wonderfully optimistic heart that reminds us that sometimes, when it feels like life has veered irrevocably off track, the track shifts in ways we never could have imagined. Readers who loved MAJOR PETTIGREW?S LAST STAND will adore this inspiring debut of a small-town college professor, a remarkable new woman at the bookshop and the 10-year old son he never knew he had.

Discussion Guide

1. At the beginning of the book, Tom Putman is resigned to a not very-fulfilling home life. Does this mean he?s kind or passive? Brave or timid? Did he make a mistake marrying Marjory?

2. Why has Rose Callahan worked in bookstores her entire professional life? How does the experience of working at The Bookstore for Mr. Pitts seem different to her from her earlier work experiences?

3. Why are Russell Jacobs and Iris Benson so antagonistic toward each other at the start of the story?

4. How does Agnes Tattle view her son-in-law? How does Tom view his mother-in-law?

5. What is the importance of Marjory Putnam inviting Rose to dinner?

6. How do you feel about Tom having a brief affair that seems to have produced a son?

7. How does Rose Callahan view her childhood? Her mother, Miss Mavis Callahan?

8. Does the community at small women?s college where SMALL BLESSINGStakes place seem cozy and supportive, or isolated and self-absorbed?

9. What effect does Henry have on Tom? On Rose? On Agnes? On Russell?

10. Why does Agnes wear her long-dead husband's pajamas?

11. Does it take courage to admit you are happy? DoesSMALL BLESSINGShave a happy ending? If so, why?

Author Bio

Martha Woodroof was born in the South, went to boarding school and college in New England, ran away to Texas for a while, then fetched up in Virginia. She has written for NPR, npr.org, *Marketplace* and *Weekend America*, and for the Virginia Foundation for Humanities Radio Feature Bureau. Her print essays have appeared in such newspapers as *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. SMALL BLESSINGS is her debut novel. She lives with her husband in the Shenandoah Valley. Their closest neighbors are cows.

Photo Credit: Charles Woodroof

Critical Praise

?SMALL BLESSINGS is a comedy of manners that will capture your heart. Woodroof's prose is tart and sweet --- smart enough to make you laugh, but with an aching soul that will make you cry. I loved these characters even as I was chuckling at them, and I know Rose and Tom are a couple you'll relish rooting for...Get ready for pure pleasure shot through with moments of illumination: maybe this is how love really is.?

Small Blessings

by Martha Woodroof

Publication Date: May 5, 2015
Genres: Fiction
Paperback: 320 pages
Publisher: Picador
ISBN-10: 1250040531
ISBN-13: 9781250040534