



Small Blessings

Martha Woodroof

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From debut novelist Martha Woodroof comes an inspiring tale of a small-town college professor, a remarkable new woman at the bookshop, and the ten-year old son he never knew he had.

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's ready or not.

A heartwarming story with a charmingly imperfect cast of characters to cheer for, *Small Blessings*'s 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 can have imagined.

Small Blessings Details

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From Reader Review Small Blessings for online ebook

Mayda says

This heartwarming story practically oozes charm and hope from each page. Tom Putnam has resigned himself to a life of painstakingly caring for his wife who suffers from a number of neuroses. Happiness is something he doesn't even consider anymore. He teaches English at a small college, and the faculty and students are all aware of the burden he bears. But then Rose Callahan is hired to manage the college bookstore, and no one's life is ever the same again. A perplexing complication to Tom's life begins with a letter first telling him he is the father of a ten-year-old boy, Henry, the result of a brief affair, and that said boy is on a train, coming to stay with Tom. Tom's predictable days are over in ways he could never imagine. These characters may have flaws that they must overcome, but this novel is pretty nearly perfect. An enchanting story that shows that fairy-tale endings can still be found in everyday lives.

Brian says

I had a great deal of trouble connecting with this book and I can't put my finger on it. The characters were somewhat interesting and very quirky, and the writing was good but for some reason the book just dragged and dragged. The premise is that a man who is married to a very quirky woman finds out that he may have fathered a child during an affair. That's the extent of the plot. There are a bunch of side characters as well who are pretty well developed. This was certainly not chick lit, but for some reason, it just didn't strike home with me.

Lesa says

When I discover a book that speaks to the truth of my heart, it's a book I keep. Someday, I will want to go back, reread it, and see if it still resonates with me. Martha Woodroof's debut novel, *Small Blessings*, is one that brought so many moments of recognition. Her phrasing is exquisite. Her characters ring with life. It's a book that will be on my favorite list at the end of the year. And, I'm not going to be able to do it justice because a summary will not spell out the beauty of the lives in this book.

Tom Putnam, Professor of English, first met Rose Callahan at a college function held at the bookstore where she was the new assistant director. And, it came as a shock when his wife, Marjory, invited Rose to dinner. Marjory was a shy, nervous woman, "an exquisite china doll, immensely chippable" whose wild phobias about germs and obscure diseases, her pathological timidity, had dominated their lives for years. But, Rose Callahan was kind to Marjory, and smiled at Tom. "And just like that he, Thomas Marvin Putnam - lover of Shakespeare, educated at Amherst College and the University of Virginia, dysfunctionally married for twenty years - was a joyous, carefree child somersaulting down a hill, joining Alice in falling, falling, falling somewhere he had never contemplated going." And, he hoped Marjory's social invitation to Rose meant there would be change in their lives.

Oh, there's change. And, Marjory's unusual behavior is noticed by her mother. Agnes moved in with Tom and Marjory years earlier, giving up her legal practice to take care of her needy daughter. Agnes is also the one who hands Tom the letter that will also bring change. Tom learns that his brief three week affair with a

poet ten years earlier has resulted in a son he never knew he had. And, Henry will be on a train to spend the next three months with his father. In moments like this, Tom can only think of dumping everything in the lap of his capable mother-in-law. Then, in one week, Tom and Agnes deal with two shocks that will change their lives forever.

Small Blessings is so much more than a novel of a small, insulated college community, or the story of change in one family. I've seen blurbs that concentrated on the charming, imperfect characters. They are all of that. Tom and Agnes, Rose, Henry, even characters with cameo appearances, but important roles, are wonderful characters. But, I saw another side of this book, the tragedy.

Small Blessings is a story of mental illness, alcoholism, and addiction, and how it affects people, both the addict and those around them. I've lived Tom Putnam's life, with a mother-in-law who suffered from mental illness, and a husband who was an addictions counselor because he himself was an alcoholic, and suffered from depression. Woodroof is understanding in pointing out that life is always off-balance for the people living with the mentally ill person or the addict. We become "skilled at coping, not at living". And, Tom realized over the years that "One human being, with the best will and intentions in the world, cannot fix what is wrong with someone else." If Tom enjoyed an evening away from Marjory, she worried, and paid the price. "As long as he lived with her, her price was his price, and an evening of fun simply wasn't worth it."

Yes, I agree with the blurbs and the reviews that say Small Blessings is an optimistic story and a story of hope. But, it's all of that because people reach out to get past the loneliness, past the pain, and the tragedy of lives that are stuck. I loved Martha Woodroof's debut novel. Small Blessings is a wonderful story of living people. And, it's joyful, and beautiful, and hopeful because the author speaks the truth.

Martha Woodroof's website is www.marthawoodroof.com

Jolene says

Thank you Netgalley and St. Martin's Press for providing this in exchange for an honest review

I have a confession to make. I could not read the ARC which St. Martin's was kind enough to provide for me. I tried. I really did. I must have picked it up and put it down no less than 4 times. I just couldn't do it. It bored me to tears. I accepted it was a DNF and moved on. While I was at the library last week, I saw the audio for this on the shelf and figured "what the hell, I'll give it one more shot". I'm glad I did. The narrator (Lorelei King) did a beautiful job bringing these characters to life.

While the story itself is pretty predictable, the characters were all wonderfully unique. They weren't over the top quirky just for the sake of being quirky, which is a nice change. All the characters were well fleshed out and likable. The story was very cute and light hearted. While I don't think I'll *read* anything by Woodroof again, I'll definitely give audio versions of any future titles she writes a try.

Written version: 1 Star

Audio version: 4 Stars

Lacey says

*I won this book from goodreads first reads.

When I rate a book it's often based less on a critical analysis and more on how much I could get lost in it while I was reading. For instance, Twilight has a much higher rating than it really deserves because as awful as it is, while I was reading it I got so caught up in what was going on I didn't notice what a horribly abusive relationship it was and how extremely anti-climatic half the books were. Until I finished reading and actually started thinking about it, anyway. Then it all came crashing down.

This, however, was one of those books where my mind wandered while I was reading. I spent the entire time noticing plot holes and wishing I was reading anything else. Most of the book was just dull, trying to be some sort of character driven slice-of-life thing, but the characters aren't interesting enough to hold my attention and there are too many of them, all too unconnected until the very end, so it's hard to keep track of who's who.

And then the last twenty pages devolve from merely boring to just awful. Ignoring the part where one of the guys comes to the conclusion that he owns a woman he's barely exchanged a dozen words with and kidnaps her (because if I don't I'll be ranting about how awful and infuriating it was until the end of time), it's absolutely ridiculous that not a single character in a novel set in 2006 has a cell phone. While it would be equally stupid for anyone to be pulling out their brand new iphone, by 2006 plain old cell phones were pretty ubiquitous and it seems like the complete lack of them is only to complicate the kidnapping sequence.

Long story short, this one just wasn't good. 97% boring, 3% just ugh.

Q2 says

I gave this book FIVE stars because even though I had critiques, I couldn't help but love it. There's something about how the characters were written that seemed so vibrant and full of life to me, I couldn't help but root for them and I desperately wanted everything to turn out happily for everyone! So, five stars, because even though some stuff was just flat-out CRAZY, somehow it didn't matter to me. :)

This is a story about a college community, the people in it, and basically the trials these characters face. Tom and his mother-in-law Agnes live together, helping one another care for Tom's wife Marjory. Rose is a new lady in town--working at the college bookstore and leaving everyone around her feeling appreciated and valued just for being who they are. Of course, the supporting characters were totally absorbing for me as well, notably two professors (Iris-loud, brash, unliked and Russell-rude, callous, also sort of unliked) who are both hidden alcoholics.

Basically, everyone's lives intertwine and overlap in some crazy ways. These characters support one another and care for each other but sometimes in the most dysfunctional of ways! Because the story has some crazy plot twists, I was never bored, and because the characters were so lovable, I desperately want to see this made into a dramedy! Thanks Net galley!

??Jülie ? says

Small Blessings: A Novel by Martha Woodroof

This is another one of those charming reads, about quirky people and how they cope in dealing with different circumstances and life choices.

The setting is the campus of a large college where many of the teachers and professors reside with their families in the small private community within the college grounds, making them neighbours as well as friends and colleagues.

The one place on these campus grounds where everyone feels united and comfortable that they are not being judged by their peers, is the College Bookshop.

There seems to be a general consensus that Rose, the new woman on campus recently appointed to run the bookshop, is someone much admired by all as a genuinely nice and good person with everyone's best interests at heart.

So the bookshop is a sort of meeting ground or hub for the college population to meet up with friends or groups...or just to browse peacefully.

Some particular alliances are formed between a resident motley group of mismatched and socially inhibited academics, who have been thrown together by a variety of life problems where they find themselves floundering in events that can...more often than not...best be described as a comedy of errors.

The book follows each character as they interact and navigate the ups and downs that life indiscriminately deals them on a day to day basis.

Through trial and error we watch them each find their way, sometimes through sad and sometimes through fortuitous twists of fate.

The book is both humorous and poignant, and I thoroughly enjoyed it as it held more surprises for me than I had initially expected of it.

4★s

Another one for the same shelf as:

The Storied Life of A. J. Fikry by Gabrielle Zevin

Lost and Found by Brooke Davis

The Tea Chest by Josephine Moon

Sue says

I won a copy of “Small Blessings” by Martha Woodroof, through the Goodreads Giveaway Contest.

This debut novel, will wrap its arms around your heart, with strong characters and surround you in love and peace. This book will stay with you long after you finish the book. I was totally taken with this book.

The writing is crisp and clear, and the prose will make you laugh and cry.

Tom Putnam, forty four years old, is an English College Professor, a lover of Shakespeare, who lived in a small college town, and spent lots of time in the campus bookstore, as well as caring for his neurotic wife, Marjory, after Tom had been found unfaithful years ago.

“One human being, with the best will and intentions in the world, cannot fix what is wrong with someone else.”

Agnes Tattle, seventy years young retired divorce lawyer, was Tom’s mother-in-law who had moved in with them, when Marjory’s chronic mental illness got worse, to help out. Agnes had warned Tom before the wedding, that Marjory was not marriage material. Agnes had been right—the marriage had been a mess from the beginning. But Agnes was a hoot! She loved her coffee, cigarettes and scotch. Agnes was bossy and demanding, but always had a good heart.

Rose Callahan, thirty seven years old, was the new assistant director of the book store. She was a college employee who attended Tom’s classes. Then, one evening at the bookstore, Tom and Marjory meet Rose Callahan, and Marjory invites Rose to their home for dinner. Her first social interaction since her breakdown. A possible positive change?

And then Tom’s life takes a radical change, when he receives a letter from his former paramour, to advise him he is a Father of a little boy named Henry! And his son is heading Tom’s way on a train. Change is coming whether Tom’s ready or not.

And Rose helps Agnes and Tom—and Henry, the son he never knew he had—realize Life’s “Small Blessings.”

“Small Blessings” is a heartwarming story with a cast of characters that are both imperfect and real. Small Blessings’s, based on the wisdom of Solomon, shows us that routine life can always change. Each character in this story brings their own set of baggage...but what they do with it is up to them.

Choosing happiness is taking a risk...and love is the ultimate goal!

Be thankful for small blessings and try and enjoy every day.

A definite 5-Star +++.

Diane S ? says

When Rose first arrives, a thirty-something unmarried woman, at the college bookstore where she has been hired, she manages to charm everyone in her path. I had a few inner doubts, wondering if this book was going to be one of those unrealistic all sweetness and light novels. As I read on though all those doubts disappeared. These are all characters who on the surface seem to be doing quite well, but underneath are dealing with the same hopes and fears many of us have to face.

An unexpected death and the arrival of six year old Henry will change things in a big way for all the

characters. These are ordinary people trying to come to terms with the unusual circumstances they now find their selves involved in. I really loved the warmth and caring Woodruff shows in portraying these people, the understanding and doubts that make them fully fleshed people. My favorite character though is Agnes, Tom's mother in law, she has suffered a tragedy in her past, she is wise, caring and funny. How all these characters join together, help each other but grow individually is what made this novel a special one for this reader. Positive novels, although everyone does not get what they want by book's end, are far and few between.

Told with a great deal of humor this was a wonderful novel. The title small blessings reminded me of my grandmother who always told us to be grateful for the small things we are given. Readers who like Anne Tyler, Jeannie Ray and Elizabeth Berg, may find much here to admire.

ARC from NetGalley.

Minty McBunny says

Full disclosure: I went to the college the one in this book is based on and the author worked in the campus bookstore at that time. So having known the author and seeing little glimpses of my college life in the book may have colored my judgement a bit.

That said, I think any lover of serious, non-fluffy chick lit would enjoy this novel. It is beautifully written with rich descriptive language and fully fleshed out, realistic, lovable quirky characters. I truly enjoyed every moment.

Susan says

Small Blessings is entirely predictable in a general sense, but completely unpredictable when it comes to the specifics. Take a gentle, decent Shakespeare professor, the son he never knew he had, and a free-spirited bookseller, a beautiful western Virginia setting, and you've got a heartwarming novel with a clear path to a happy ending, right? But the professor is married, the son isn't quite what he seems, and the bookseller...well, okay, she's pretty much as advertised. The plot makes a number of fascinating twists and turns and the supporting characters almost steal the story. Novels that manage to be charming without being cloying are small blessings in themselves. I look forward to more from this author.

Syrie James says

This novel hooked me from the first chapter and surprised me in so many ways. Right off the bat there's an event I did not see coming, that sends the story in a completely new direction. From that point on, even though the ending was easy to predict, the plot takes many twists and turns which kept me involved and interested. I loved the main characters, Tom, Rose, and Agnes. They were very well drawn and they each went on an important life journey, growing and changing by the end--which to me is the hallmark of a good story. I adored Henry, the little boy who enters all their lives, and acts as the catalyst to promote all this healing and change. I wasn't as fond of some of the supporting characters, but they did add tension to the story. My only gripe is that the college where it's set didn't feel like a real place, and there were a lot of coincidences and events that didn't ring true, especially the dramatic "crisis" tossed in at the end which, (not

wanting to give away any spoilers) I think was ridiculous and totally unnecessary-- it didn't belong in this novel at all. Despite this, however, I enjoyed this book a lot and I recommend it!

Angela M says

After reading the description of this book and when I first started reading it, I thought it was going to be just about bunch of quirky people in this small college town whose lives were going to change because of the little boy who enters their lives. I thought it would be funny and maybe a little sad and that not much more would happen than he would become part of this quirky little world. I was wrong – not about the fact that these people are a bit quirky and not about how Henry changed their lives, but I was wrong in thinking that this was all the book was about.

It was about some sad and lonely people, all of whom were at a crossroads in their life in some way. Martha Woodroof does a beautiful job of letting you inside these characters. Tom is an unassuming professor and good man who has stayed by his wife for over twenty years in spite of a debilitating mental illness. Agnes is his smart and feisty mother-in-law who lives with them. She too has had her share of sorrow. Rose is the new employee at the campus Book Shop and she seems lost – should she stay or move on as she always does? Then there is sweet, little Henry who has seen more than a lifetime of sadness given his short life. I loved these characters and how they connected. It's evident when Tom meets Henry that this little boy will be more than a "small blessing" to him and Agnes and probably to Rose too.

I was also wrong in thinking that this would be a totally predictable book. I have to admit I was shocked early on in the story and wasn't quite expecting what happened. But the story is full of surprises - Tom certainly wasn't expecting Henry in his life and I didn't expect the really sweet caring relationship between Tom and his mother in law Agnes. But the twists continue with a piece of the story you wouldn't have suspected up until then. So maybe the ending was a little predictable, but this was a heartwarming story that was so well written, I will be looking for the author's next book.

Thanks to St. Martin's Press and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this book.

Patty says

This book was a little different. Tom Putnam is married to Marjorie but she is mentally ill and her inability to deal with any of the simple basics of life. This has curtailed not only her life but Tom's and her mother's who also lives with them. Tom has remain devoted to his 20 year marriage except for one affair 10 years ago. They all live rather quiet, staid lives on the college campus where Tom teaches Shakespeare. Then in the course of a couple of days Marjorie goes out to a college party, a new woman comes to work in the college bookstore, Tom learns he has a son and he is on his way by train to come for a visit. Whew!

But through all of this Tom remains calm. Very, very calm. Nothing seems to phase him. I don't want to spoil too many plot points but let me just write that through death, drunks, small boys and bouts of insanity Tom remains the same. Only once I believe does he show any passionate emotion and I really found this disconcerting considering all that goes on in his life. He just rolls along accepting all that happens no matter

what.

Rose, the new woman that comes to the campus is a ray of light. EVERYONE loves her and she is like a fairy distributing sweetness and light. Like Tom she is very much a one note character. In fact most of the characters lack any real development even as some of them. The plot was a bit lacking for the most part and the sub plots did little to help move the story along.

I kept hoping for explanations for various actions but rather like Tom things just ambled along with no fuss and no bother.

2.5

Penny (Literary Hoarders) says

4-4.5 stars. This book charmed me to no end. First of all, thank you very much to Goodreads, I won this book in the Goodreads First Reads program. This book has been compared to, or could be compared to, based on its description, "The Storied Life of A.J. Fikry". Some have loved it, some have hated that one. Small Blessings however seems to hide in Fikry's shadow. It really deserves to be placed ahead of it (do I really know that? I don't, as I haven't read Fikry yet.) Small Blessings is an incredibly charming read filled with fabulously flawed characters. It's set on a college campus, takes shots at its administration and comes complete with quirky faculty and a Book Store to boot. I was immediately sold, but when began reading was completely charmed and delighted.

Becky says

Feeling BLESSED. Love , Love, LOVE this book!!

Small Blessings summary and message -- Life is messy. People are basically good, smart and doing their best. Trust that everything will work out. Be HAPPY!

Get your hands on a copy or order this for your book club RIGHT AWAY. (You can thank me later.) Guaranteed to warm your heart and affirm that life really IS good.

Lisa says

3+ I was in the mood for a comforting novel and this one, with an academic setting (including a bookstore), was just the ticket. As you would expect from the title *Small Blessings*, by the end of the novel all the loose ends are nicely tied in a bow. There was more than one surprise along the way though and it was an enjoyable read.

Barbara says

3.5 stars: This is an intelligent chick-lit novel. It's beautifully written, sweet, and a joy to read. The chick-lit themes are there. It melts into being a bit sappy; yet as a reader, you enjoy the melt. Woodroof is talented

and writes beautiful prose.

“Small Blessings....taking sustenance from the simple pleasures of everyday things...when you got down to actual survival, that was the big picture.” The novel is full of homespun wisdom such as this. Also, another favorite: Worrying meant you were trying to control something you had no business trying to control. I should have that taped to my fridge, closet doors, and mirrors.

The first sentence of the novel caught me: “There she was, as welcome in this insular community a fresh air in a multiplex, a woman who, rumor had it, risked being happy.” Yes, it’s a wonderful, feel-good chick-lit. If you’re in the mood for a fast read, a wonderfully written book, that leaves you in a great mood, this is a book for you.

Margo says

I loved this book. I had to stop myself from reading it too fast so I wouldn't finish it too quickly. I wanted to linger over every moment of the characters relationships with each other.

Susan Barton says

Tom Putnam is a pleasant and quiet English professor in a small college town. Tom’s wife Marjory’s mental illness is a drain on everyone around her and causes a great deal of gossip in the community. Yet, through it all, Tom remains the devoted and (almost) faithful husband. Aside from one brief affair with a colleague several years prior, Tom stands by Marjory despite her trying behavior.

When tragedy strikes, Tom’s life changes almost overnight – particularly when free-spirited Rose Callahan arrives to manage the college bookstore, then even more so when Tom learns he has a six-year-old son, who’s on his way for a sudden visit. Can things get even more complicated for Tom and those around him? Yes, they can...

When I spotted this book on the bargain table at my local bookstore, I was first drawn to the book cover. Then I read the inside cover and was intrigued enough to make the purchase. Yet, as I began to read, I admit that I had some trouble getting into the story. I felt as though the author meandered a bit too much and I began growing bored quickly. In fact, I almost gave up a few times, but I stayed with it. Actually, I’m glad that I did.

There are several very touching moments in Small Blessings. Several subplots are at work here and they do come together in the end. The characters are charmingly flawed and that’s what makes this such a lovely read. On the surface, many of the characters seem to be almost gruff and unfeeling, but the author does a wonderful job of opening them up so readers can see the complex emotions underneath – and after all, isn’t that how people really are? Tom is probably the one constant in the book – good natured, kind and consistent almost to a fault, but not quite. I found his character to be the anchor that holds the story together.

The ending was somewhat predictable, but I didn’t care one bit. It was exactly the way I’d hoped it would

work out. Small Blessings is well worth sticking with through to the end. It's a charming story about life, loss and love!

5 of 5 Stars, Susan Barton, <https://ebookreviewgal.com>
