

Falling from Disgrace

Tammy Dietz

Cynren Press

(246pp)

978-1-947976-45-0

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Tammy Dietz's memoir *Falling from Disgrace* is about growing up Mormon in the affluent Bay Area.

Starting in her 1980s girlhood, Dietz began to ask questions about her family's Mormon beliefs. Her life revolved around her parents and siblings, the church, her friends, and striving to be a good girl according to Mormon standards. However, not everything seemed as perfect as it was presented. At home, the tense dynamics between her hoarding, distant father and her emotionally damaged mother created an environment of neglect, contradictions, and unhealthy patterns.

The strictures of the Mormon church also sparked questions for Dietz, primarily related to the gender-based disparities in congregants' roles and rewards. As she matured, Dietz grew confused about her faith, her sexual purity, and her destined role as a Mormon wife, but she felt unable to confide in her family. In high school, she became rebellious—making out with boys, shoplifting from department stores, and losing what seemed to be a Mormon woman's sole worth, her virginity. Later, she ran away from home and constructed a new life, making space to evaluate her faith with fresh eyes and explore what she truly believed.

Told via evocative and descriptive passages, *Falling from Disgrace* brims with powerful metaphors and vivid images, as with a description of a temple interior (a space that is off-limits to non-Mormons) during a sacred ceremony: "twelve life-sized sculpted brass oxen supported a huge white font, like a large round cast-iron tub." Mormonism itself is also detailed with care; the related passages are informative but not didactic.

Throughout the book, the prose mirrors Dietz's maturation well: as she covers each era of her life, the book's language and style grows with her. It includes interior monologues during critical moments to deepening effect, resulting in powerful scenes. Further, Dietz recreates her conversations with others in a way that's attuned to people's natural cadences, invigorating key moments in the story with due tension and emotion. The result is a book that achieves fantastic balance throughout—between reflection, confusion, and understanding. Even the cover image of a rose proves integral to the larger story.

A sensitive and beautiful memoir, *Falling from Disgrace* is about perseverance, doubt, and the importance of claiming one's identity, even when it is deemed "wrong."

N.T. MCQUEEN (November 4, 2023)

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