



Win Me Something

Kyle Lucia Wu

Tin House Books (Nov 2, 2021)

Softcover \$16.95 (268pp)

978-1-951142-89-6

A young woman figures out how to belong in Kyle Lucia Wu's novel *Win Me Something*.

Willa isn't passionate about being a nanny, but it beats working at another coffee shop. Her latest charge is Bijou, a precocious nine-year-old next to whom Willa feels inadequate. As Willa navigates this new world of privilege, feelings about her own childhood float to the surface, pushing her toward a reckoning with her past—and into possible futures.

In Willa's eyes, Bijou's family is light years away from her own: well off, whereas hers is working class; attentive, whereas hers is neglectful and absent; devoted to Bijou, whereas Willa's divorced parents are preoccupied with their younger children. Adding to Willa's sense of disconnect is her ethnicity: she is half Asian and half white, which prompts confusion and nosy, insensitive questions from strangers who think that they are entitled to her life story. The contrast between her current life and her childhood is made plain through painful, lonely flashbacks. It is also implied in Willa's reactions to events that, for anyone else, would be ordinary.

Willa is a compelling but unreliable narrator: there is much more to Bijou's family than she is ever aware of. Her desire to belong—such a human instinct—makes her relatable, as do her occasional, mild indiscretions, such as sneaking into her boss's room to try on make-up. She spends so long wondering why she doesn't fit in that she never thinks about how her own actions might contribute to her present situation. That realization, as late as it comes, may allow her to find a place for herself at last.

Win Me Something is a wistful novel about how much effort it can take to find and settle into your place in the world.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (November / December 2021)

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