

Pretty Girls Don't Eat by Winnie Salamon

Ford Street Publishing

RRP \$17.95

ISBN 9781925272772

Review by Claudia Trotter

We are bombarded everyday with images of how the female body is supposed to look. In her light-hearted novel, Winnie Salamon captures the unrelenting issue of body image. She explores the daily pressures felt by teenage girls to maintain a socially acceptable weight and body type through the character of Winter Mae Jones. The novel, narrated by the protagonist Winter, tells the story of a sixteen-year-old girl who is overweight and uncomfortable with her appearance. However, Winter has a remarkable talent for fashion design. Her journey of eventual self-acceptance is filled with obstacles and enhanced through the help of her two best friends, the beautiful and intelligent Melody and skinny-legged, compassionate George. The short and succinct chapters allow the novel to move at a pace readers are easily able to follow, with regular scene changes and varying characters. Salamon vividly encapsulates somewhat mundane everyday experiences like trying on a dress in a fitting room; she comically expresses exactly how one feels when it doesn't quite fit over your thighs and the wash of shame felt when you have to request a size up. The characters are well balanced, in particular Melody who has a model-like thin frame and a striking Eurasian appearance whilst simultaneously being the smartest girl in school. However, her disjointed home life and neglect as a child adds weight to her story, inhibiting her from being the idealistic teenage girl she initially appears to be. The occasional direct address to the reader from the character Winter is exceptionally powerful and the rhetorical questions provoke the reader to reflect on their own perspective surrounding body image and consider whether Winter is right to feel the way she does. Although the novel is centred around such a harrowing topic, Salamon positions the issue within a joyful coming of age story with humorous dialogue and likeable relationships between the characters. An incredibly relatable book for teenagers and an enjoyable read, very hard to put down!