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Groff, Lauren. Arcadia

In the 1970s, a group of idealistic hippies come together with a vision of utopia, following their charismatic leader, Handy, on a cross-country trek which ends in western New York state at a decaying mansion known as Arcadia House. Bit (the littlest bit of a hippie) is the first child born to the new Arcadians and he grows up in the commune among the optimistic, romantic, and ultimately all-too-human adult founders. We see through his eyes as his mother struggles with a deep and abiding clinical depression, as his father challenges the increasingly haphazard ?leadership? of Handy, as the commune grows from a tightly-knit core of like-minded individuals with a vision of cooperation into a sprawling morass of the lazy and the criminal and the insane, as the commune eventually dissolves away into nothing after Handy?s arrest. Having never lived ?Outside,? young Bit is thrust into a whole new world and must make sense of it as well as he can until, as an adult, circumstances return him to an Arcadia very much changed, but still a place of refuge.

A plot summary cannot do justice to the lyrical and poignant power of this novel. Bit is a thoughtful, sensitive, and entirely sympathetic narrator and it is a pleasure to grow up alongside him, watching as his perceptions and understandings change with time. Highly recommended.

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