



Erotica

Best Lesbian Erotica 2011

Kathleen Warnock, editor

Cleis Books

978-1-57344-425-5

(November 30, 2010)

A solid annual series since 2003, the *Best Lesbian Erotica* collections have become known for delivering spicy stories filled with humor, affection, play, and plenty of erotic encounters.

This year's collection is selected by Lea DeLaria, a lesbian comedian and jazz vocalist well-known in the gay community. Her choices follow certain trends and ideas in the "collective unconscious," writes series editor Kathleen Warnock in her introduction. Whereas the 2010 collection included more humorous offerings, this year, writers explored political topics like gay marriage, and expressed doubts and hopes about negotiating long-term relationships.

Another trend in the collection is the inclusion of many stories told from the butch point of view, or describing butch-type women seducing femmes or being mistaken for men. In general, though, DeLaria expertly chose content with an array of perspectives, situations, and seductions.

In some stories, sex is carefree and almost anonymous, as in "Ladies' Coupe," written by an Indian writer who calls herself only Anamika. As a young woman makes the journey from New Delhi to her family in Lucknow, her daydreams are interrupted by a female police officer looking for a fugitive. The conversation takes a decidedly seductive turn and soon both are enjoying the privacy of the ladies-only train coupe.

In other stories, relationships figure heavily, and it's the depth of love and trust that make the sex scenes even more rambunctious. Stories like Kenzie Mathews's "Art School Confidential," about an art student and her girlfriend, give a glimpse into the playful and sultry erotic life of a couple, emphasizing that with time, women come to know each other's bodies more thoroughly and delight in a blend of predictability and experimentation. Even fantasy comes into the mix in "The Garden of Earthly Delights," by Betty Blue, a writer whose work has appeared in several lesbian erotica collections.

The array of action-packed and sex-heavy tales range from playful romps to serious role-

playing adventures, and each is suffused with such an air of delight and eroticism that the collection, as a whole, benefits from the strength of its many individual stories. DeLaria's selections can each stand alone in terms of solid writing and creative scenarios, but when blended together, they provide a rich, well-chosen compilation that proves the series is still going strong nearly a decade after its start.

Elizabeth Millard