

Clara Reads Proust

Stéphane Carlier

Polly Mackintosh, Translator

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A lonely hairdresser finds comfort and inspiration in an unlikely place in Stéphane Carlier's effervescent English-language debut, *Clara Reads Proust*.

The people working at the Cindy Coiffure hair salon are a dissatisfied bunch. Patrick is overqualified and knows it, Jacqueline drowns in nostalgia for the happy days of her youth, and Clara has fallen out of love with her picture-perfect boyfriend. When a customer forgets a copy of Marcel Proust's *Swann's Way* at the salon, Clara is gripped by the winding prose, the depth of emotion, and the growing feeling that her life should be more than it is.

For Clara, there is nothing that *In Search of Lost Time* cannot do. Its characters guide her through romantic troubles, and the books themselves enable her to bond with Claudie, a trans woman with her own special regard for Proust. Clara finds herself transformed in a different way: with Claudie's help, she discovers an entire world that she never knew existed yet fits into like she was always meant to be there.

Before Proust, Clara's life revolves around the everyday crises and adventures at Cindy Coiffure, which are depicted with an irresistible blend of humor, charm, and poignancy. After, she sees literature and the world in new, more expansive ways. Her obsession alienates some, but the connections she forges, and the magic of the writing itself, inspire wonderful resiliency. With encouragement from Claudie and motivation from Proust, Clara takes a chance that changes everything. In the sentimental epilogue, she is able to look back on her life with contentment and gratitude, knowing that all unfolded the way that it did for a reason.

Clara Reads Proust is a fun and moving novel about the life-altering, immortal power of words.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (May / June 2024)

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