



Clio Rising

Paula Martinac

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Paula Martinac's latest novel, *Clio Rising*, is both a story of lesbian friendship and a literary mystery. Livvie Bliss—a young, out lesbian fresh from the North Carolina countryside—and Clio Hartt—a closeted lesbian known for one successful novel that is now decades old—are thrown together for the sake of a literary legacy. Bea Winston, who is Livvie's boss and Clio's agent, is tasked with urging Clio to produce new work for a collection of short stories. Cantankerous and evasive about her work and her life, Clio is a challenge for the green Livvie who is still trying to find her way in New York City's lesbian community.

Martinac's prose is bare and fits Livvie's inexperienced narration and views. She stumbles into living arrangements and relationships with gawky earnestness. Livvie's down-home charm garners favor with Clio, who also hails from North Carolina. The plotting of Livvie's East Village life and that of her working relationship with Clio keep the story moving forward.

What sets this apart from a simple tale of older and younger lesbian life is the surrounding mystery of Clio's onetime lover, Flora Haynes, and her connection to Clio's one and only successful novel. As Livvie and Clio grow closer, Livvie begins to realize there is more to the original manuscript of the novel and the affair between Clio and Flora.

Inventive and imaginative, Martinac's novel draws upon two compelling eras in gay history—the expat Parisian world of Gertrude Stein and the burgeoning gay scene of 1980s New York City. There is a slight narrative surrounding the AIDS epidemic that, though brief, shows its severity and loss. *Clio Rising* is a solid and pleasing addition to Martinac's oeuvre.

MONICA CARTER (May/June 2019)

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