



★ **Flannelwood**

Raymond Luczak

Red Hen Press (Jun 6, 2019)

Softcover \$15.95 (200pp)

978-1-59709-897-7

Raymond Luczak's novel *Flannelwood* is a subtle, sexy exploration of love gained and lost—and a moving literary tribute to Djuna Barnes and her groundbreaking novel *Nightwood*.

Bill, a forty-year-old MFA who's getting by with a coffee shop job, had fallen hard for James, whom he met at an OctoBear dance. The two had enjoyed six steamy months of weekends at James's house outside the city before James made a phone call that ended it all. Now Bill is left wondering what he did wrong. He deals with his heartbreak by looking back at his previous relationships and contemplating the nature of love and desire.

Flannelwood has very little in the way of plot and focuses instead on Bill's memories and emotions, rendered in the first person. The opening scene shows the first time Bill sees James's leg, amputated below the knee, thus introducing themes of the body, sexuality, and disability. From there, the narrative moves back and forth between Bill's current wrecked emotional state and anecdotes from his time with James and from earlier years in his life.

The writing is lyrical and poetic, sometimes beautifully so, at other times veering into the vague and abstract. The novel's strongest sections are more grounded in Bill's storytelling and in his reflections on being gay, discovering the bear community, and finding love and heartbreak. His narration is charming, conversational, and blunt.

The novel is also testimony to the power of literature to shape readers' lives. *Flannelwood* is full of literary references, but Djuna Barnes and *Nightwood* haunt the novel particularly, playing an increasingly important role in its later sections. The lyricism of Barnes's depiction of love and longing among queer characters in Paris inspires Bill and provides a template for him to understand his own heartbreak.

Flannelwood beautifully captures the transformative power of love and the devastation of losing it, all while meditating on literature's power to console.

REBECCA HUSSEY (May/June 2019)

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