

## Shine of the Ever

**Claire Rudy Foster**

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In Claire Rudy Foster's thirteen stories, collected in *Shine of the Ever*, various characters—women adrift; transgender people who fear exposure; binary and nonbinary people—experience disquiet, fragile peace, naïvete, and renewed strength. A lost, punk version of Portland, Oregon becomes a setting for self-reckoning.

There are characters who love their roommates but won't admit it. A recovering addict fears the future but finds reprieve. A trans woman who's guided by horoscopes learns that she doesn't need to fear honesty. A young out-of-towner rejects her polyamorous lover. Over and over, the discomforting side of personal relationships folds into sharp stories about braving crossroads.

Whether they're weighing the problem of loving someone while being haunted by memories of an ex-lover, or facing the bristling reality that queerness can feel like wearing multiple masks, these characters' vulnerable defiance stands out. At their lowest, they're drawn with merciful clarity. At their best, they experience small kindnesses that keep them afloat.

Highlights include "Field Medicine," in which tarot readings lead to empathy, and "Domestic Shorthair," whose narrator experiences a gradual rift with their pastry-chef roommate. "Shine of the Ever," a multipart exploration of leaving old loves behind to make a better start, exemplifies the book's sometimes troubled, sensitive narrations. Speakers' imperfections and hurts magnify all-too-familiar longing. Mistakes and pleasures meld with subtle, well-controlled turmoil that builds a careful momentum.

Flash fiction entries—such as an aggressive encounter that's recreated with sexual tension and the finale, in which an off-duty clown performs a chicken trick to zero applause—are the collection's outliers, but even these compressed moments display the uneasy, internal questioning that percolates throughout.

*Shine of the Ever* is a compassionate ode to a Pixies-infused era. With its mix of fear and fearlessness, it deftly portrays love on the fringes.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2019)

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