

The Shimmering Go-Between

Lee Klein

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Whimsical yet sincere, this Russian doll of a novel blends traditional and contemporary literary techniques.

Lee Klein spins the bizarre but touching story of an autofellating widower and a woman prone to virgin births in his debut novel. Klein, a graduate of Oberlin College and the Iowa Writers' Workshop, makes use of the full, expansive potential of the novel form in *The Shimmering Go-Between*.

The plot revolves around Dolores, a woman who has largely shut herself out of society because of some strange biological oddities, and Wilson, a man who has not been able to move on after his wife's death. Other characters enter and exit the story, sometimes surprisingly reappearing to play crucial roles. Suffice it to say that in both level of complexity and the wheels-within-wheels workings of the story, an apt comparison can be made to the structure of a Russian nesting doll, with new elements of the story suddenly exposed each time Klein peels an outer layer away.

The prose is whimsical at times, but there's an overriding impression of sincerity that allows readers to care about the characters and provides a buoy to grasp onto as the novel grows increasingly fantastic. The writing combines turn-of-the-21st-century situations (e-mails figure heavily) and contemporary literary techniques (varying the amount of blank space within quotation marks to indicate the length of a wordless pause) with an appreciation for the classic sound and feel of well-chosen words. As Wilson mourns his wife, the description is a perfect blend of short sentences and long ones, those spoken and those left unspoken:

"All he wanted was mid-January to arrive five months early. Sleet, high wind, ice storms. Wanted to nurse himself. Disappear in warmth and comfort. Walk around unwashed with a quilt around his shoulders, clasped by blue-pale hands tight to his heart. But it was the meat of the year: when the light's perfect, the shadows long, just a whiff of autumn, everything fully in bloom or one step past ripe."

Klein also provides occasional small, hand-drawn illustrations throughout, which add in mood and intimacy what they might lack in professional polish. They help draw the reader into the surreal world of the book.

A moving, modern meditation on loss and renewal, *The Shimmering Go-Between* is recommended for readers who want innovation and whimsy without losing the heart and soul that makes a story resonate long after it's been read.

PETER DABBENE (Fall 2014)

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