

★ **Wild Geese****Soula Emmanuel**

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A trans woman confronts her uneasy past when her former girlfriend makes an unexpected visit in Soula Emmanuel's intimate, provocative novel *Wild Geese*.

Phoebe is a thirty-year-old Irish graduate student in Copenhagen. Halfway through her doctorate program, covering a topic she's no longer interested in, she feels as though she's living in a postscript. Then Grace shows up without notice, saying she's just stopped by "to catch up a bit." But their relationship ended seven years ago with an agreement "to stop catching up."

Although wishing Grace gone, Phoebe lets her in. With that simple gesture, she is thrust into confrontations with the past she decided to forget. While taking Grace on an obligatory tour of Copenhagen, the women share stories they've never spoken about before. Phoebe (who was assigned "male" at birth) tells Grace about her childhood, including what it was like to stumble about in her mother's high heels knowing she was different. And Grace reveals the painful reason she broke off their relationship.

The prose is complex, beautiful, and compelling. Phoebe's inner world shimmers in half-light as she seeks clarity about her place in a transphobic world. She asks intriguing questions about how much is gained and how much is lost in the quest for personal authenticity, confessing that "the whole effort [is] terrifying, but to turn away seemed even more so." That statement encapsulates the feeling at the book's close, when Grace has left and Phoebe makes a phone call, the results of which are left unknown.

Wild Geese is a sensitive, thoughtful novel about personal identity, the loss of illusions, and growth into love and wholeness.

KRISTINE MORRIS (September / October 2023)

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