

Hunger, by Jane Eaton Hamilton. Oberon Press, 157 pages, \$15.95 paper.

Most of the characters in "Hunger" - women and men, gay and straight - inhabit a world roiled by emotional turbulence. Love evades them; their relationships are disintegrating; partners betray them; their lives are defined mostly by loss, longing, confusion, uncertainty. In "Goombay Smash," a Key West vacation meant to breathe new life into the dispirited domesticity of a lesbian couple instead disintegrates into days of wrong turns, crossed signals, long silences, and denied sex. In "Kiss Me or Something," a lifelong lesbian disdains the cautionary fretting of friends, so sure is she that the once-straight woman who now proclaims a Sapphic love eternal will never leave her for a man. In this uniquely voiced collection, nothing about matters of the heart is easy, or obvious, or even settled. The magic of these 10 short stories, though, and of Canadian writer Jane Eaton Hamilton's insightful, fluid - and often disarmingly witty - prose is that, in elegant, edgy fiction as in messy real life, sorrows of the soul are redeemed by a resilience of spirit.

Featured Excerpt:

In bed, when we finally got there, she used her hair like a lovemaking appendage, taking clumps of it in her hands and tickling them over my breasts or across the tender skin of my inner thighs. When she grew braver, when we'd been lovers a few months and she knew the territory, she'd have me lie naked and stock still on the bed while she made love to me with only her hair for what seemed like an hour, until I was beyond myself, until I couldn't help grabbing her up.

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