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TITLE INFORMATION

ALLY

Madison Scott-Clary
Self (476 pp.)
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BOOK REVIEW

A trans woman reflects on her changing identity in this revelatory memoir.

Scott-Clary, a computer programmer and the editor-in-chief of publisher Hybrid Ink, recounts a long transition in the form of a dialogue between herself and an inquisitive alter ego named “ally.” She offers a complex and psychologically fraught story about “past me”: Matthew, a gay teen with an insensitive father and homophobic stepfather who immersed himself in the furry community and developed an aversion to messy, real-life sex, preferring phone sex or typing out fantasies with online partners. A stable relationship with a gay man developed into marriage, which included polyamory. Scott-Clary wrestled with bipolar disorder, tics and balance problems caused by medications, and a dissociative episode that led to a suicide attempt. The author had gender reassignment surgery in her late 20s that made her feel more comfortable in her own skin. This book, which began as an interactive online writing project, is a multigenre work that includes poetry, snippets of fiction, artwork, and many original musical compositions. Most of the text consists of autobiographical conversation, which meanders at times, especially in sections in which the author talks about her writing process. Still, Scott-Clary is a talented writer who conveys her inner world in a way that’s cleareyed yet powerfully immediate, from the helplessness of a suicide attempt (“It was like the rush of coming to your senses after a nightmare, the pulling forward and the re-anchoring, the flood of adrenaline in preparation for flight”) to her postoperative blossoming (“The first time I looked in the mirror and saw the trace of femininity. The softening of skin. The first ‘she’ on the street. The first ‘ma’am’ on the phone. Hell, the first time dressing feminine”). Scott-Clary isn’t afraid to take creative risks, and they pay off in an often engrossing portrait.

A fresh, daring exploration of lived experience.

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