



★ **Pale Shadows**

Dominique Fortier

Rhonda Mullins, Translator

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Dominique Fortier's novel *Pale Shadows* imagines how Emily Dickinson's death impacted those who loved her.

Dickinson did not achieve true fame until after her death. Before that, only a handful of close friends and relatives were privileged enough to share reclusive Emily's life and writings. And how her death touched those few people, and how they chose to honor her memory, came to affect the course of English literature as well.

The story moves between four characters: Lavinia, left alone in the house she once lived in with her sister; Susan, who mourns her beloved sister-in-law alongside her long-dead son; Mabel, who knew Emily vicariously through her letters; and Millicent, Mabel's daughter, a lonely and precocious girl in search of her place in the world. On occasion, Fortier pauses the narrative to discuss the difficulties of trying to bring women and feelings long dead back into the realm of the living.

Gorgeous, aching prose relates the different shades of grief each woman feels: Susan buries herself in Emily's words, while Lavinia, ever practical, busies herself with chores and the all-important task of getting Emily's poems published. Their stories are worked into a quilt of the pain that they might have borne together, if only their differing morals, obligations, and mental struggles did not keep them apart. They share their love for Emily, and while this may not be enough to make friends of such different personalities, it does give them a common light to seek at the end of their long, dark passage. Combined, their enduring affection for an extraordinary woman helps to make "Dickinson" a household name.

Pale Shadows is a breathtaking contemplation of grief, legacies, and how what a person leaves behind continues to change and inspire the world.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (January / February 2024)

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