



Solo Dance

Li Kotomi

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In Li Kotomi's empathetic novel *Solo Dance*, a young woman struggles to find her place in a world that is hostile to her sexual identity.

Norie's early years in Taiwan were difficult. Known then as Yingmei, she felt early on that being a lesbian set her apart from her classmates. The death of her first love sent her into a depression, and although she began to recover in high school, a vicious attack deepened her suffering. At twenty-seven, she now works in Tokyo with a new name. It's a chance for a new life.

The novel begins during Norie's time in Tokyo, but frequent, lengthy flashbacks fill in details of her Taiwan years. This structure emphasizes the depths of Norie's problems: she feels she cannot escape homophobia and the dark events of her history. The slow disclosure of Norie's past builds understanding about her obsession with death and her guarded and suspicious attitudes toward her coworkers. She knows from experience that self-revelation brings danger.

The novel's settings are varied and lively, including Taiwanese schoolrooms, university dorms, Tokyo offices, lesbian bars, and Pride parades. Each space becomes fraught as Norie negotiates the real and potential judgments of others, along with her own pain.

The novel's center is Norie's mental and emotional state. Her thoughts, feelings, and actions are rendered in close terms, evoking sympathy and understanding. Those around her are less developed, sometimes serving only to advance the story line. And Norie's characterization is emphasized over the plot: later sections of the novel rely on implausible coincidences to advance her development. Still, *Solo Dance* is a moving character study about the consequences of homophobia, and the resilience that's required to survive it.

REBECCA HUSSEY (May / June 2022)

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