



The Evolving Truth of Ever-Stronger Will

Maya MacGregor

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In Maya MacGregor's empowering novel *The Evolving Truth of Ever-Stronger Will*, an agender teenager learns to acknowledge their trauma, find strength in others, and exist without apologies.

Though Will once found comfort with their foster mother, Raz, they were returned to their abusive mother Frances six years ago. Then, just months before Will's eighteenth birthday, Frances dies. Desperate to stay out of the system, Will enlists their friend Hannah and Hannah's older brother Matt, an EMT, to help keep Frances's death under wraps until their birthday.

But even dead, Frances is full of surprises. Will is sucked into a world of angry junkies and the vengeful sons of superintendents. Far more intriguing for Will are the letters they uncover from Raz. They begin trying to find Raz—and the only person who ever completely understood them, gender-fluid Julian.

The book is narrated to Will by Will, resulting in intimacy. Will's voice is blunt; they are unafraid to put their anger and hurt in clear terms. But they also maintain a natural, dry humor, incorporating sarcasm, irony, and pop culture references into their speech. And the people around them are diverse and authentic, too, including biracial Matt, nonbinary Julian, and Hannah, who is a lesbian and has Tourette syndrome. Will forges positive new relationships with Matt and Julian, his found family members; in time, the layers of abuse they endured at Frances's hands, and the residual impacts of that abuse, are explored with nuance. Still, Will's friendships are not idealized; their relationship with Hannah becomes strained, revealing differences in privilege and forcing open communication.

The Evolving Truth of Ever-Stronger Will is a novel in which a marginalized teenager finds rich support as they make the difficult transition from abuse to trust.

EMILY GAINES (November / December 2023)

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