

Radiant Shimmering Light



Sarah Selecky

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FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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About Sarah Selecky

Sarah Selecky's short-story collection, *This Cake Is for the Party*, was a finalist for the Scotiabank Giller Prize and shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book. Sarah lives in Ontario and is the creator of a popular writing school.

Praise for Sarah Selecky and *Radiant Shimmering Light*

'In *Radiant Shimmering Light*, @SarahSeleckyWS nails the Perfect-Yourself 35-43 gen in all of its hopeful internet-brand-conscious pyramid-scheming empowering goddessiness. Social satire + cultural insight whipped into a yummy froth! You'll laugh + shed a tiny precious tear, my petals!'
@MargaretAtwood

'Our online world provides endless humorous possibility and here is a book that's witty, timely, and smart with regard to social media. But then, quite wonderfully, Selecky's story turns more complicated than it first appeared. Bursting with energy and color, every page delights and provokes. This book is a dazzler.'
Karen Joy Fowler

'Sarah Selecky could easily be the next Alice Munro.'
Chatelaine

'The human desire to belong is at the heart of Sarah Selecky's radiant, shimmering novel. In the person of Lilian Quick, Selecky has created an irresistible heroine. She has once again proven that she is a writer perfectly attuned to the music of the present moment.'
Barbara Gowdy, author of *Little Sister*

'*Radiant Shimmering Light* is inventive and modern. Sarah Selecky delivers a cast of characters who are both recognizable and utterly unique in this novel that is as luminous as its title.'
Marissa Stapley, author of *Things To Do When It's Raining*

'Fresh and original, Sarah Selecky's novel cleverly satirizes our insta-world but also takes its characters seriously enough to give them an ending that's moving and transcendent.'

Kerry Clare, author of *Mitzi Bytes*

A reader's introduction to *Radiant Shimmering Light*

A sharply funny and heartfelt novel about female friendship—and about how, in our online lives, the line between personal empowerment and consumerism is increasingly blurred.

Lilian Quick has looked up to her cousin Florence her whole life. Florence is everything Lilian is not: brave, adventurous, American. They've been out of touch for twenty years—but Lilian, forty, single and struggling as a pet portraitist in Toronto, has been watching Florence, who has become internet-famous as Eleven Novak, the face of a feminine-lifestyle empowerment brand.

When Eleven comes to town on a sales tour, she welcomes her long-lost cousin with open arms. Lilian quickly enrolls in the Ascendency, Eleven's expensive signature course in spiritual awakening and marketing, and heads to The Temple in Manhattan. Eleven is going to help Lilian build her brand and be her best self: confident, affluent, self-actualised.

In just three months, Lilian's life changes drastically and becomes everything she's dreamed of. But is it everything she wants? And can she really trust Eleven?

Questions for discussion

1. *Radiant Shimmering Light* is a story about two women, neither of whom are married or have children. Yet it's not a novel about romance or relationships (it passes the Bechdel test—where

at least two women must talk to each other about something other than a man—with flying colours!). It's not even really a novel about friendship. Why is this such a rare story?

2. This book is near-historical fiction (set in 2016). How is it already dated? Why is it important that it's this particular slice of time?
3. Did you notice the subtle differences between the Canadian and American parts of the story? Why do you think this tension is so persistent? What did you notice changed about the characters depending on which country they were in?
4. Looking at each of the characters in the book with equanimity—who is the antagonist? If everyone—including Eleven—is doing the best they can, is the antagonist systemic? How does that perspective change who you like or don't like in the book, and why? Why are we so fixated on liking the protagonist and disliking the antagonist in books?
5. Sarah Selecky has specifically stated that this book is not a work of satire. If it wasn't her intention to satirize the women's empowerment movement, how are we supposed to look at it?
6. The women's empowerment space is very privileged. It's often made up of wealthy white women "empowering" other wealthy white women. Eleven comes from this kind of privilege—and one could say she has blinders on when it comes to the rest of the world. Does this discount some of the lessons she's sharing with her community? How do we wrestle with that reality?
7. At the beginning of the book, Lilian considers inviting Yumi to Eleven's talk in Toronto, but she worries Yumi won't fit in. How would a gender fluid character navigate a binary space like Ascendancy? Where else in the book are there binaries, and where else are they dissolved?
8. A lot of the communication in the book takes place over text or social media. Are the friendships in the book what you would define as "real" friendships?
9. Have you ever bought or sold something to a friend? What happens when the personal becomes transactional? Is it problematic? Or is it a great way to empower women?
10. Why does it take Lilian so long to surrender and see people auras, not just animal auras? What's holding her back?
11. At the end of the book, a family happens upon Lilian making sand art on the beach. She hears them making comments about her being "not quite right"—but she doesn't care. She's finally unafraid to be herself. To be weird. How does our culture make room for women who are making art that's not commodified?
12. A lot of the themes in this book—digital overwhelm, anxiety about money, the commodification of everything—are real sources of stress. But, in the end, is it a hopeful book? How did you feel at the end?