

CLOSET CONFESSIONS

Love, Loss, and What I Wore
dresses up Corvallis' Majestic Theatre

What a twist of fate!" Storm Kennedy exclaims, as she prepares her role in *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*, a play by sisters Delia and Nora Ephron, based off the book by Ilene Beckerman.

Kennedy's enthusiasm for this project isn't just about the chance to do a great play by a couple of iconic female writers, although that's certainly a plus. Between the two of them, the Ephron sisters have penned the screenplays for *When Harry Met Sally*, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, *Julie & Julia* and so many more wildly popular films. For this play they have soaked Beckerman's autobiography in a tincture of honesty and hilarity about the passionate relationship between a woman and her wardrobe. The character of Gingy is lifted from the original, where the Ephron sisters have surrounded her with new monologues and riffs on a variety of ensemble-inspired themes. The play is generally staged as a reading, but actresses are off book, giving the impression of a candid conversation, rather than a theatrical spectacle.

According to Kennedy, this play scrambles into the darkest corners of your closet, covering everything from the tragicomedy of a bad purse to "the really scary experience of buying your first bra."

But Kennedy's connection runs deeper than clothes.



STORM KENNEDY

Ilene Beckerman is the mother of Isabelle Beckerman, who Kennedy describes as "one of my oldest, dearest friends ... we lived together in New York City during the 1980s." Just this fall, Kennedy received a copy of *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* from the younger Beckerman. Kennedy enjoyed the read; "The book has my friend

Isabelle, and all her siblings in it." So you can imagine the thrill Kennedy experienced when, attending a wedding at the Majestic, she noticed an audition sign for the play. She jumped at the opportunity and landed a role. "It is the sickest, craziest thing!" she says.

While we can all understand the appeal of doing a play based off a book by your best friend's momma, this still leaves Kennedy driving up to Corvallis for rehearsals. The mother of two is on the air with the KUGN news at 5:30 in the morning. I asked how she manages it all. "The nap is key," she notes. "I set my schedule very diligently: I get home from work, take a nap, set the kids up with homework, dinner, pack their lunches for the next day." Then she's on the road, listening to her lines as she heads up the freeway to Corvallis.

Director Leigh Matthews Bock has certainly made the drive worthwhile. "What a complete joy it has been, working with these six amazing women," Bock says. "When I first read the script, I thought it was a unique, fun way to talk about women," she notes. But as her work on the play has progressed she has found that our clothing does have a deeper message, even for women who don't care about what they wear; "You don't want to judge a book by the cover, but our coverings do tell part of our story."

This play, which *The New York Times* describes as "chick legit" about life and clothes, sounds like The Best Play Ever to me, but I had to ask Kennedy, "What's in it for the men?" "Insights and answers," she says, noting that in New York, the audiences are a good one-third men, all whom have wives or sisters or daughters or mothers, and can finally understand that it's not just the woman in their lives who are confronted with the existential crisis of nothing to wear. ■

Love, Loss, and What I Wore opens at 7:30 pm Friday & Saturday, March 1 & 2, and 2:30 pm Sunday, March 2, at the Majestic Theater, Corvallis; \$12.

BOOKS BY ALEX NOTMAN

A TALE OF TWO WOMEN

Local author Barbara Corrado Pope explores Belle Epoque Paris in an elegant murder mystery

The opening chapter of *The Missing Italian Girl* plays out like a scene from a Merchant Ivory film; the year is 1897, the city is Paris and three shrouded figures dodge the ghoulish cast of gas lamps near the Gare de l'Est as they bring a special (and posthumous) delivery to one of the city's dumping waters, the Basin de La Villette. In the city of lights, on a warm summer night at the turn of the century, the trio is taking a great risk. Guided by the young and confident Russian revolutionary Pyotr Ivanovich, two Italian teenage sisters — Angela and Maura Laurenzano — find themselves swept up in a world of anarchy and murder by the basin that night, as the plot is elegantly set in motion.

Local author Barbara Corrado Pope rewrote that chapter of *Italian Girl* three times before finding her new muse, the tough-as-nails Maura Laurenzano. "That's how Maura became such a big character," Pope says. "Because I said, 'I like this, I like being 17 and nasty. I like having those big emotions.'" *Italian Girl* is the third installment of Pope's murder mystery series that was born with the novice judge and investigator Bernard Martin and his love interest, the indefatigable, schoolteacher Clarie, in *Cézanne's Quarry* in Aix-en-Provence and continued to unfold in the *The Blood of Lorraine* in Nancy. Published Feb. 13, Oprah's Book Club soon named *Italian Girl* a "Compulsively Readable Mystery" for the "crazy-smart reader."

Now, a reader mustn't be a scholar to enjoy Pope's novels, but paying close attention to the details is required to suck the marrow from a Parisian mystery that tugs at several historical threads at once: the labor movement ("the unionists, they were the bulwark of the labor movement"), immigrant populations ("It's always been a city of immigration"), class disparities (the "desperate conditions" of Paris' working poor) and the women's movement ("American and English feminism was very confrontational ... That wasn't present in France"). And like the city's Arc de Triumpe, where several streets meet to form a 12-pointed étoile, so is *Italian Girl's* Lycée

Lamartine, a place where these historical themes collide.

"I wanted to know where [Clarie] taught so I did research on the schools. It was important for me to pick a school that was not the poshest but was very good, and had a mixed population." On a visit to Paris, Pope found that school in Lycée Lamartine, in the heart of the Montmartre quartier — the stomping ground of artists like Toulouse Lautrec at the end of the 19th century. "I stayed in an apartment that was two blocks away from the school," she says. Pope says she was able to treat Montmartre like the village it once was because she "kept walking around the neighborhood." The school also ties the two female protagonists together: Clarie, a schoolteacher, and Maura, whose mother Francesca is the school's charwoman.

"A lot of the plot is about how Clarie sees herself in Maura," Pope says. Clarie, who is still feeling the loss of her child in *The Blood of Lorraine*, has become a professional, "dignified" woman with the domestic responsibilities of a husband and a toddler. Maura's brashness, independence and strength stir the fire in Clarie's belly that had almost gone out. That fire turns into a blaze as Clarie and Co. attempt to find out what happened to the missing Italian girl. ■

Barbara Pope will do a reading of *The Missing Italian Girl* at 2 pm Saturday, March 2, at the UO Knight Library Browsing Room.

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