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BOOKMONGER

Nancy Pearl's debut novel – growing into an imperfect marriage

No matter what else she has ever done, Nancy Pearl has achieved some kind of immortality by serving as the model for the best-selling Librarian Action Figure (“With Amazing push-button Shushing Action!”).

Before she became an action figure, Pearl was a local phenom as director of The Washington Center for the Book, housed at the Seattle Public Library. She spearheaded inspired, out-of-the-box programming to introduce people to books and authors.

Outside of the Puget Sound region, people probably know her for her “Book Lust” book series and TV series that have introduced readers to hundreds of scintillating reads. And anyone who listens to NPR’s Morning Edition surely recognizes Pearl’s voice, her cadence, her propensity to chuckle as she delivers recommendations on a vast array of books that are “under the radar” but that deserve to be read.

Now the shoe is on the other foot. Nancy Pearl has written a novel of her own, and “George & Lizzie” is fodder for the consideration of other book reviewers and of readers like you.

The novel begins with a poem by Irish-American poet Terence Winch that presents a conflicted take on sex and relationships.

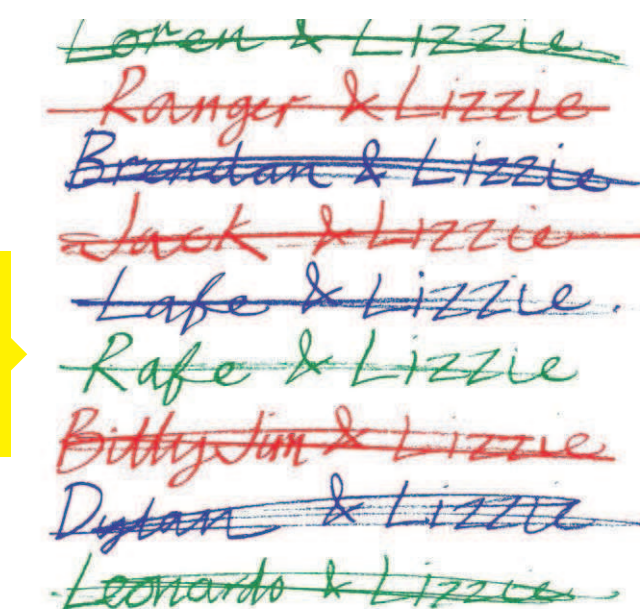
Then you’ll jump to Pearl’s introduction of Lizzie, who is heartbroken, stoned, and spending a night at the Bowllama with her college roommate and her roommate’s boyfriend.

“George & Lizzie”
By Nancy Pearl
Touchstone
288 pp
\$25

When Lizzie haplessly unleashes a bowling ball that bumps into the next lane over, it ruins the heretofore excellent game that the fellow next to her had been having. His name is George.

It’s a meet-cute, sort of — although that gets left behind for quite a while as Pearl quickly backpedals, detouring variously into Lizzie’s emotionally unavailable parents (who are specialists in behavioral psychology) and her complicated childhood; George’s fairly happy upbringing and his reasons for going into dentistry; Lizzie’s adolescence, when her most distinctive achievement involved serially bedding every single starter on the high school football team; and then her spectacular quarter-long affair in college with senior Jack McConaghey, which involved lots of poetry and sex, and that ended when Jack graduated and went away for the summer and never came back — the cause of Lizzie’s heartbreak.

Many pages (and, in the book, several months) later, George and Lizzie begin dating, but Lizzie still secretly dreams of finding Jack again. Even after she marries George, she continues to wonder about Jack and — this is in an era before the internet — furtively visits libraries and combs



GEORGE & LIZZIE

a novel

through phone directories from around the United States, looking for Jack’s name.

This book has no chapters. Instead, it is presented in segments of varying lengths — character sketches, occasional lists, even poetry — that one might guess were rearranged several times before Pearl settled on their order. It is slow-going at first, and it is easy to become impatient with complicated, confused, depressed Lizzie.

But if you can stick with it, this novel gradually becomes suffused with something ineffable, but abiding. Is it self-forgiveness? Detachment? Wisdom?

This is an interesting debut.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at bkmonger@nwlink.com.

Crossword Answer

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