



A tale of raucous fun

Spunk, luck and happiness combine in 'The Roxy Letters'

Mary Pauline Lowry is a native of Austin, Texas. However, this book column, which focuses on the Pacific Northwest's writing scene, has license to cover her latest book, "The Roxy Letters," because Lowry moved to Boise earlier this year.

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Even so, it must be conceded that this quirky novel, with its mildly neurotic, 20-something protagonist, is at heart a love letter to Austin. This might have been enough to have set this book aside for a more obviously local book, except that from page one, the first-person voice of this novel was so messily, magnetically hilarious, that it was impossible not to turn the page and quickly be ensnared for the story's duration.

The book's voice belongs to Roxy, who works behind the deli counter at the original Whole Foods in downtown Austin. She has done nothing with an art degree she graduated with five years earlier. She's fallen out of touch with her friends from college who are living more conventional lives. And except for a crush on the guy who works in the beer aisle at Whole Foods, she has no love life to speak of, although she maintains a semblance of a sex life with a mechanical device.

Roxy has just rented out her spare bedroom to her ex-boyfriend, Everett, because she can't afford to pay her mortgage and her vet bills for her two needy "furballs."

In the book's prologue, she writes out an absurd set of house rules to Everett.

And because the schedules of this landlady and her renter rarely coincide, these letters continue, becoming the body of this epistolary novel.

The year is 2012, a consequential time for the

This Week's Book

'The Roxy Letters'

By Mary Pauline Lowry

Simon & Schuster — 320 pp — \$26

Austin neighborhood where Roxy works. It's fun and funky vibe is being encroached upon by corporate retail chains which are snapping up storefronts, wanting a piece of the street's offbeat allure.

Roxy has been feeling vague stirrings of concern that this might be the ruination of everything that is special about the place. The final straw comes when Lululemon moves into the space vacated by a lamented local video store.

"A Lululemon store destined to sell overpriced workout gear to trophy wives," she rages in another letter to Everett. "Is this glorious town we live in selling its quirky, beautiful soul to the highest corporate bidder?"

Finally, she is motivated to get out of her rut and becomes an activist protesting the corporate takeover of the neighborhood.

Along the way, she enlists a motley corps of supporters including co-workers, college buds, her ex and even a zany new acquaintance who works at Lululemon. They're all great characters, as is Roxy, who makes up for her many annoying qualities with candid self-deprecation, and with her uncanny knack for doing the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time frequently in laugh-out-loud fashion.

With spunk and luck, happiness prevails. "The Roxy Letters" is a romp.

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@nwlk.com.



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