



A SMALL CROWD OF STRANGERS

a novel

JOANNA
ROSE



"Joanna Rose's beautifully lyric novel is a gift: the work of a true storyteller. Her quiet, careful wonderment nourishes our souls."

—Paulann Petersen,
Oregon Poet Laureate Emerita

This Week's Book

'A Small Crowd of Strangers' by
Joanna Rose

Forest Avenue Press — 394 pp — \$18

Transformative story of powerful growth

'A Small Crowd of Strangers' is packed with detail

The past few weeks have presented us a terrible pall. Books can provide solace or temporary distraction but September was a hard month in a hard year.

I hope the adversity we've been facing will serve, ultimately, to bring us together.

In that spirit, this week's pick is a novel by Portland author Joanna Rose, "A Small Crowd of Strangers." Rose tells the story of a young woman who doesn't understand the importance of community until she finds a place that needs her as much as she needs it.

Pattianne Anthony is 30 years old. She lives in an apartment above a dry cleaning store. She has a friends-with-benefits relationship with a local tavern owner. Although she recently earned a master's degree in library science, she sticks with her part-time job in the North Jersey Regional Education Lab rather than looking for a full-time job.

Pattianne is a lapsed Catholic, which doesn't have much to do with anything until a guy comes into her workplace one day. On a whim, she gives him her number and suggests he call her sometime.

Michael Bryn is an attractive young schoolteacher. He's five years younger than Pattianne. That doesn't seem to be an issue, nor that he's a practicing Catholic. It certainly doesn't keep him from having adventurous sex with Pattianne regularly, even after his priest advises him to "disentangle"

himself.

But when Michael's dad is diagnosed with congestive heart failure, Michael is pressured to think about the future.

Michael and Pattianne get married. This doesn't involve much reflection on Pattianne's part ... it just seems like the thing to do at the time.

The couple moves from New Jersey to Minnesota, where Michael has accepted a teaching position at a Catholic school. He begins making new friends with staff members and parishioners at the local Catholic church, and later becomes involved with a right-to-life group. Pattianne begins to realize this isn't what she signed up for.

Michael urges her to take a job as librarian at his school. She finds a part-time job instead at a local new age bookstore.

Pattianne and Michael's paths diverge further when instead of becoming pregnant, she adopts an aged mutt named Bullfrog.

Even more consequential complications arise.

Rose's mastery of the exquisite detail is unparalleled. It is her painstaking application of these details that enthralls as Pattianne slowly transforms from a callow, carefree young woman to someone who knows her own mind.

Some stretches of this story are difficult to bear but trust the author. She knows exactly what she is doing.

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.