

Riveting thriller takes place on Washington's coast

BY BARBARA LLOYD McMICHAEL

If you've been waiting for a twisting psychological thriller to read at the beach, look no further. "The Lost Kings" is made to order.

This page-turning mystery hopscotches across time and space as Jeanie King, a 30-something American working as a shopgirl in Oxford, England, recalls unsettling fragments of her childhood. — The car crash that killed her mother. Her veteran dad's spiral into alcoholism and rage. Her dad's psychotic new girlfriend. The lonely stretch of Washington coast where Jeanie and her twin brother Jamie hung out with another outcast kid, Maddox.

And, when she was 13 years old, the night that her father came home with his hands covered in blood. By the next day, he had disappeared for good — and so had Jamie.

Jeanie was taken in by her aunt and uncle in California. But without her brother, she is desolate. She misses Maddox, too, who

might have been her first crush.

Emotionally untethered, Jeanie's teenage years are rebellious. When she moves to England for college, which is where her mom went to school, she never goes back stateside.

But that doesn't mean she hasn't looked back. She is consumed with disturbing memories, and even meets regularly with a therapist, someone she can sort through her issues with.

And she has plenty of those: she displays no ambition, she drinks too much, and in addition to having an affair with a married man, she sleeps around with other men, too. Above all, she's still devastated by the loss of her twin.

She figures that's why she has turned out the way she is. "I was set on becoming a passing figure in other people's lives. I wasn't a long-term friend, girlfriend, sister, daughter — I was transient," reads an excerpt.

But Jeanie is jolted out of this rut when a figure from her past shows up at her doorstep: Maddox. He is a journalist now, and

he's been pursuing the story of what happened to Jeanie's dad. He thinks he has located him. Jeanie would rather know about Jamie, but Maddox has no information about that.

Although Jeanie is reluctant to confront her dad, he is probably the only one who can tell her what happened to her brother, and why she had been left behind.

Maddox persuades her to fly back to the United States and meet with her father. "The Lost Kings" was written by Tyrell Johnson, originally from Bellingham and now living in British Columbia. He spins out this story in terse but telling detail.

His characters engage in sex, violence and betrayal. They indulge in drugs and alcohol. But they also meditate on notions of time and stardust. They tussle with memory and seek out connection and love.

Johnson dexterously blends these desires and people into a fluid narrative. He throws in a couple of literary sneaker waves that surge forward unexpected, overwhelming with their power.

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

THIS PAGE-TURNING MYSTERY HOPSCOTCHES ACROSS TIME AND SPACE AS JEANIE KING, A 30-SOMETHING AMERICAN, IS WORKING AS A SHOPGIRL IN OXFORD, ENGLAND.

"The Lost Kings" is by Tyrell Johnson.

This week's book

"The Lost Kings" by Tyrell Johnson

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