



Dancing Naked... In Fuzzy Red Slippers

Carmen Richardson Rutlen

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Everyone gets inspired. Unfortunately, only some have the good sense to carry around a notebook and pencil to record those fleeting bolts of truth, inspiration, and enlightenment when they strike. The rest rely on memory alone, and therefore, stutter and stumble most days through a smattering of lackluster observations, half-truths, and forgotten punch lines.

Thank goodness then, for this author. By some gracious act of volunteerism on behalf of the aforementioned memory-reliant rest, Rutlen seems not only to have carried—but also to have recorded and published—a witty and meditative notebook. Part poetry, part confessional, part literary dance recital, this book engages the reader as both audience and partner through the various dances of life.

Each of the six chapter steps to a different beat. “Fandango” dedicates itself to friends and family; “Tripping the Light Fantastic” discos with God; “Tango” is, of course, set aside for love. Like any instructor worth her tap shoes, Rutlen leads readers with a light but firm touch, alternately skimming and delving into the depths of emotion, with a mix of sentimental narrative and thought-provoking observations on love, loss, happiness, hatred, menopause, and everything in between.

The author, who runs an advertising agency in California, has published essays in several *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books, and won the “Celebrity Award” of the National League of American Pen Women. This is her first book.

In one piece, she says simply: “I’ve seen / lives of quiet desperation. / For myself, I prefer / my desperation / loud and obvious.” Many of the pieces will remind readers of quirky Seinfeld-esque ruminations on nothing, which, when revealed, inspire readers with a quick smile: “Whoever thought / of calling clear wine / ‘white?’ / And what color / does that make / milk?” while others resonate for nights afterward, such as: “If you find yourself / coloring outside the lines / and if this makes you nervous, / make the lines wider.”

It’s likely that this book will appeal most to women readers who can relate to the writer as a mother, a daughter, or a hormonally challenged middle-ager, but anyone who has suffered the slings and arrows of divorce and jilted love—or who has celebrated lust, art, and humanity for all its fire and foibles—no doubt will appreciate it. Readers will be grateful for the freedom never to carry a notebook again.

LYNDA TWARDOWSKI (March / April 2004)

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