FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Harvey and Eck
Erin O'Brien
Zumaya Publications
978-1-55410-271-6

Sometimes the most unlikely premises succeed. The idea that a woman would randomly pick a name out of the phone book and write letters of the most intimate nature to that person stretches believability, but it works in this novel. Written in the form of letters that Harvey mails and Eck doesn't, a delightful story unfolds pairing two characters who form the most unlikely alliance. Harvey is a pregnant engineer, rides a motorcycle, and is not afraid of a little profanity. Mr. Timothy J. Ecklenburg is a librarian, wears two watches, and has had the same lunch of tuna salad and carrot sticks for as long as he can remember.

Desperation drove Harvey to write that first letter. She refers to it as "head cleansing on a budget." She needs someone to talk to, and her husband is too engrossed in pending parenthood to even recognize her. Besides, she can't tell him about the lover who just dumped her or how scared she is about being a mother. (Paternity is not in question. Harvey can clearly remember the times with her husband when the diaphragm malfunctioned. Or as she put it, "Okay … it was a little problem. Like I forgot to use it. That night and the next morning and that one other time.")

Even though there is no return address for Eck to send a missive back, he writes letters to Harvey, first addressing her concerns and sharing bits of wisdom gleaned from the Literary Department of the Main Branch of the Public Library, but soon, he includes information about his reclusive life. He hasn't been out much since Pearl told him they didn't have a future together.

The author, whose late brother John was the celebrated author of *Leaving Las Vegas*, is a contributor to local publications in Cleveland, Ohio, and the editor of *The Broadview Journal*. This is her first novel, and it is a fine debut, full of wit and strong characterization. This is how Harvey explains her dalliance with the other man, whom she refers to as Captain Crunch because she doesn't want to reveal his real name: "Maybe it was just a case of under-appreciation for bread and butter, or an overactive thirty-something libido driven by the instinct to multiply (tick-tick-tick-tick-tick). Yeah, that's it. That last one sounds good. Almost like it makes sense."

Not only are the letters a literary device for telling the story, they become therapeutic for the central characters who both "grow up" during the year in which they write them. It's almost as if Harvey gleans a little bit of Eck's steadfastness, and Eck throws off a few of the bonds that have held him to his rigid routine.

Maryann Miller