



Kenzie Book 1

Marilee Worrell

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The poet Alexander Pope famously said, “Woman’s at best a contradiction still.” He might have been describing the heroine of Marilee Worrell’s novel, *Kenzie*. At age forty-two, Kenzie St. Clair is unloved, a virgin, and completely naïve about personal relationships. She’s also a trained military operative, a hired killer on the run from one of her victims’ revenge-seeking brothers. She is muscular but feminine, confident but awkward. The question posed by Worrell is whether such a complicated woman can find happiness and security—the peace of letting someone else know her true self.

Kenzie jumps between genres, though it mostly uses the conventions of a romance novel. It’s no accident that Kenzie St. Clair is an athletic, busty blonde with “coral pink lips.” Her friends, the Dwyer family—five motherless teenage boys and their widowed father—are similarly good-looking. There is also a small army of enemies, other operatives at work in a conspiracy to take down Kenzie and her mission. In most cases, this multitude of characters works well in *Kenzie*. They add fuel to the plot when things slow down, and keep the reader on her toes. At first, distinguishing between the children is difficult, but their personalities come out more as the story unfolds, and the sibling interactions are realistic and well-considered. Including this family dynamic in the novel helps offset the gun-blazing, explosive spy plotline. In many ways it grounds the novel, and allows Worrell to show off her strong points: interpersonal relationships, dialogue, and body language.

When Worrell focuses on Kenzie St. Clair and her internal struggle to develop lasting relationships, Kenzie glides along effortlessly. Though the novel starts out a little rough, it soon eases into a frisky pace that keeps the pages turning. There’s plenty of inner monologue to let the reader know how her feelings are changing. “Kenzie sighed softly to herself,” Worrell writes. “His reaction unexpectedly gripped her heart. She had heard the disappointment in his voice. Jeff Dwyer was making it very hard to leave.” These little glimpses into Kenzie’s psyche make her a more believable, sympathetic character. They help the reader reconcile her many contradictions, while filling in the character’s back story. By the first fifty pages, the reader is rooting for Kenzie all the way.

This novel is unabashedly over-the-top. Fun, thrilling, and easy to read, it’s a good choice for readers who want to be entertained. *Kenzie* is projected to be the first book in a short series. As a beginning, it’s very promising and will leave readers wanting more.

CLAIRE RUDY FOSTER (July 1, 2010)

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