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CLARION REVIEW ★★☆☆☆ GENERAL FICTION

The Lady With the Monkey

William Lower
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The novel begins with a prologue too often a red flag for readers and truly one in this case. The disjointed prologue—a background information dump—links to the remaining 230 pages of this novel via a television. The boy who received his first TV at age five grew up to be James Weir a freelance writer in Los Angeles. After a fall from grace at the studio where he worked as a scriptwriter he began hawking his writing and himself to whomever will pay. When we meet him Weir makes enough money to support an amazing cocaine habit (referred to as 'chop chop whoof') retain his Porsche and wait for his married lover Amy to tell him when her husband leaves town.

The author writes at length about the cocaine use probably some of the best descriptions in the book. "I cut yet another line and blast my nasal membranes once again. Each nostril is getting assaulted equally but I am seeing more clearly now…. I bend over and whoof up another line. Saw a British commercial couple of weeks ago for Electrolux vacuum cleaners. 'Nothing sucks like Electrolux.' Clearly they have not seen this nose go into action. The great nasal vacuum."

The description of a drunk vomiting on a man having a bowel movement in a bathroom stall may be the most graphic and least necessary passage in the book — think *Dumb and Dumber* only less relevant.

More than halfway through the novel the storyline writing and pertinent details improve. At this point Weir abandons his life in the United States and travels to Cluny France. Connections between people and places in this little French community become clear. The author uses scenes to create complete individual personalities such as Emile the butcher. But it is too little too late.

The twist at the end—predictable to anyone who has ever watched old Cary Grant movies—resolves nothing. The novel ends with a feeling of 'to be continued' which is true with most lives but doesn't work well for novels.

Author William Lower a former creative advertising director from Ontario engages the reader with his flippant prose and flashes of delightful descriptive passages. But those memorable passages leave the remainder of the writing in the dust. Add to the uneven writing a lack of character development and the all too common topic of a man lost among the glitz of the television business. Even the statue for which the book is named gets short shrift when it comes to description or significance. Some young male readers perhaps college age might find the bathroom scene the drinking and cocaine binges and sexual references enough to maintain their interest. But even the colorful passages lack energy lack passion.

Sadly like Electrolux this novel exists in a vacuum and sucks.

DAWN GOLDSMITH (June 28, 2007)

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