

YOU, ME, AND THE INSECTS

Barbara Henning

Spuyten Duyvil (\$14.95)

by Kris Lawson

You're sitting in a train station or an airport, waiting. Uninterested in the reading material in your hands, you instead spend your time gazing at the people around you in tiny, furtive glances. Why does that man wear sweatpants and dress shoes? Where is the eerily silent family of four traveling with so little carry-on luggage? You wonder, you eavesdrop, and if you have enough energy after the soul-sucking enervation of waiting rooms, you speculate.



Poet Barbara Henning's novel *You, Me, and the Insects* is eerily similar to the experience you might have if that traveler's dream came true and presented you with a stream-of-consciousness answer to this question: why is that woman of a certain age dressed as a hippie and reading a yoga book, and why is she going to India alone?

Our narrator, Gina, is a widow with two grown children. An artist with a profound interest in yoga as a life-changing philosophy, she travels annually to Mysore to study with different gurus. This year, she hopes she has found the one who will fulfill her expectations.

Still grieving for her husband Lenny—his body wrecked by years of drug- and alcohol-abuse, their marriage wrecked long before by the growing distance between them—Gina conceals her secrets under layers of piffle. The book is structured as Gina's diary and into it she pours the most mundane details of everyday life as a temporary resident of India. It overwhelms at first, with more detail about yoga than the casual reader could possibly need, although aficionados may enjoy the students' comparisons of their teachers' methods and the reading material cited.

But the smothering waterfall of yoga information quickly fades into the background as Gina first annoys, then fascinates us. What is she looking for, and why can't she take a direct line to it? Instead she hops from one friendship to another, from one yoga practice to another, and, in between, occasionally confides a memory that illuminates her guarded existence.

Reading Gina's diary is hypnotizing, and the reader is caught up in her quest for a new apartment, a cure for her back injury, and the amiability of her new teacher. That easy mood comes to a crashing halt in the latter part of the book, when Gina transcribes lengthy segments from the guru's lessons; these indigestible sermon blocks might have been more effective if they had been curtailed somewhat. But apart from that, *You, Me and the Insects* is an enjoyable, thoughtful book, with enough detail to please the readers who come to it for yoga and philosophy, and enough character and action to please the rest.

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