

I Know Who You Remind Me Of

by Naomi K. Lewis

Winnipeg: Enfield & Wizenty, 2012, ISBN 978-1-926531-51-9, 229 pp., \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Dave Williamson

Calgary's Naomi K. Lewis has a first novel behind her (*Cricket in a Fist*, 2008) and she now offers her first collection of short stories. Ranging in length from a short-short to a novella, the nine selections in *I Know Who You Remind Me Of* are funny, sexy and often provocative, and most of them feature bang-on dialogue.

One of the best is "Nix and Six," a pitch-perfect first-person narrative from Tess, who tells of her Grade Nine school life with friends Nichola and Serena, the "Nix" and "Six" of the title. It's a report from the world of first-year high school – the smoking, the boozing, the dances – as this likable trio immerses itself in the experience of getting to know boys. Here's an example of Tess's voice: "That was last period, and after, Serena clung to me like a life preserver, dragging me along while, still buzzing bad vibes about the Henry/Jizmack debacle, and in need of some cheering up, she and Nix went shoplifting at the mall." (33)

In "Warp," another fine story, 17-year-old Karen is in Florida with her brother and sister – 12-year-old twins Malachai and Michaela – and their parents, who are on the verge of splitting up. Karen is enticed by a biker into modelling for porn photos for \$100. The story moves fast and nicely captures Karen's confusion and her desire to be a sexpot for boyfriend Gavin back home.

"Weft" is a raunchy story told from four points of view in sequence: Berry, Ben, Karen and Larry. Ben doesn't want sex with a woman, he just wants her as a friend. Berry and Larry have good sex but don't last together. Karen wants sex with Ben but can't talk him into it.

Karen lives alone and can't afford it. "Her last roommate had left after a fight over the toilet paper situation – had been hoarding rolls in her bedroom because, she said, Karen habitually used too many squares . . ." (144)

Noel is the male narrator of "Flex," a satirical riff on the concept of flex time in jobs. The slightly mind-bending story, which probably needs to be read twice to be most appreciated, tells of Noel being asked to start earlier every day so that eventually he'll be finished before he starts. This variation on the Bill Murray movie *Groundhog Day* has its moments, but a sexy co-worker of Noel's named Jeanette steals the show.

A third of the book is devoted to a novella called "Attachment." It begins promisingly with a letter of application from 29-year-old Bonnie Dey to the Bottle Rock-It Soda Pop Company. It is the year 2020 and that outfit is running a contest to find the perfect person to staff "the world's first self-contained extra-atmospheric rocket and skydiving device." Attached to the letter are a resume and no fewer than 76 pages of notes.

The notes – the "attachment" of the title – present Bonnie's bizarre life story: her being adopted, her first exposure to skydiving, her anemic brother, her adopted younger sister who became a TV star, her many oddball adventures. Bonnie's letter (and the illustration of a skydiver on the cover of the book) might lead you to expect a story about a "Human Rocket" – or perhaps a fictional version of last fall's record-breaking jump by the Austrian skydiver Felix Baumgartner. Instead, what you get is a kind of shaggy dog story, without the absurd punch line.

Just as good as “Nix and Six” is “Swear It,” in which 29-year-old Mia, who has a master’s degree in English, tutors a Japanese fellow named Hayato in English idiom. He seems to like her, but she doggedly sticks to her relationship with Steve. Mia is likable and horny, while Steve has lost interest and prefers smoking, playing computer games and being alone in his office. He’s getting more and more set in his self-pitying ways while Mia clings to the hope that she can get him interested in her again. Author Lewis’s great ear for dialogue makes their arguments so authentic! And the contrast between Mia-Hayato and Mia-Steve is perfectly done.

I Know Who You Remind Me Of was the 2012 winner of Enfield & Wizenty’s \$5000 Colophon Prize for new fiction. 🍷

Dave Williamson is a Winnipeg writer whose latest book is the comic novel *Dating*.

Buy *I Know Who You Remind Me Of* at McNally Robinson Booksellers:
<http://www.mcnallyrobinson.com/9781926531519/naomi-lewis/know-remind-me?blnBKM=1#.UUDi4o4rhzU>