



The Done Thing

Tracy Manaster

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Lida Stearl prides herself on always knowing the most appropriate thing to do in any given situation-- confidence that has served her well in building her career as an orthodontist, maintaining a happy marriage, and raising her young niece in the wake of a violent tragedy. But now she's a widowed, retired empty-nester and the small perfections of an orderly life are not quite enough to stop her from feeling adrift.

Then a well-intentioned birthday gift leads to the discovery that Clarence Lusk, on death row for the murder of Lida's sister, is seeking penpals from the outside. And so, for the first time in her life, Lida crosses a line: she begins to write to him, pretending to be naive, twenty-three, and just the slightest bit flirtatious. As letters pass steadily between Lida and Clarence, her preoccupation with his crime and its echoes intensifies, and she finds that crossing one line makes the ones that follow all the more tempting to cross.

The Done Thing Details

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Author : Tracy Manaster

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From Reader Review The Done Thing for online ebook

Michelle says

This is a story about 63 year old Lida Stearl. Eighteen years ago her brother-in-law killed her sister and her sister's lover. She took in her niece Pam after the violent tragedy. Now that her husband has passed and Pamela has married she finds herself living a rather lonely life. Pamela buys her a computer for a present. After doing some google searches she finds that her brother-in-law Clarence is looking for pen pals before he is due to be executed. Lida decides to write to him as 23 year old Maisie. They then forge a relationship writing back and forth to one another. Lida has become absolutely obsessed with revenge on Clarence.

Initially I found this story interesting but as it went on my interest started to wane. I never really connected with any of the characters. I also found Lida and Pam's relationship a bit odd for how close they supposedly were.

I typically read a lot of thrillers, suspense, and mysteries and I think this book was just too slow a crawl for me.

Thank you to NetGalley for proving me with a digital ARC in exchange for my honest review.

Lisa Aiello says

I was given a copy of this through NetGalley for my honest review.

I really enjoyed the storytelling in this one. The author has quite a way with the turn of a phrase. The story itself was a tough one to read - a bit like watching the proverbial trainwreck. You see the wreck coming, you want to warn everyone about it, but you can only sit back and watch helplessly. We join Lida's life at 63 years old. She is now retired and widowed - with a lot of time on her hands to look back and reflect on her life. Her sister was killed 20 years earlier, the victim of her husband's rage when he finds out she was having an affair. Lida is left to pick up the pieces of the family, and to raise her young niece - now left without a mother and essentially a father. Lida couldn't have children of her own, and she lovingly and carefully raised this young girl. Her niece's father, is still in prison, but is coming to the end of his appeals. Lida becomes a bit obsessed, and befriends him though a prison pen pal program. Of course, she hides who she is in her letters, creating a somewhat flirtatious young persona, and it slowly becomes an out of control spiral with some unintended consequences.

Sandia says

I just found this book so hard to get through for so many reasons. The main one being that the narrator was so annoying! She was irritating and creepy and really none of the characters felt like real developed humans and I just couldn't deal with how false everything felt. Even the writing, which was weirdly disjointed and fake.

And on top of that, the main action in the story line feels trivial and undeveloped as well. Things happen

because the author wrote them as such, not because anything in the world prompted them to be so.

I just can't consider myself a fan.

Sm says

Most persons fully engaged in the world have, from time to time, experienced some injustice, felt resentment, desired revenge, and been affected by shame and guilt. For a great majority, these are transitory emotions that dissipate over time. For some, these passions create permanent wounds that leave scars and change personality. It is these scars and personality adjustments that, with some accommodation, allows people to continue their life's path overcoming what otherwise would be unsurmountable emotional obstacles. Sadly, a few go completely off the rails, become obsessive and engage in behaviors that would have been unthinkable prior to an event that triggered their difficult psychological journey.

So it is with Lida Stearl. She carries guilt from her mistreatment of her first love, she is burdened by miscarriages, and finally her sister is murdered. Lida carefully and selfishly arranges the care of her niece, but becomes obsessed with dark desires for revenge against the murderer, her own brother-in-law.

The consequences of this obsession are at the heart of this book. The writing is outstanding. Every scene and each piece of dialogue is realistic. There is tension and suspense. Issues involving the frailty of human imperfection, the value of truth telling, civil and emotional justice, family and forgiveness are all explored in a page turner of a story that despite its deep themes remains thoroughly entertaining.

TL says

I received this via Goodreads Giveaways in exchange for an honest review. All my opinions are my own.

3.5 stars, after thinking about it some.

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Not what I expected completely but I still enjoyed reading this. One of the genres is listed as 'suspense' but it didn't feel like that to me. Yes, there were some tension filled moments but overall I just found it a very interesting tale/character study.

When I was in high school, I had penpals. I would go on these sites and put my info out there (with mom right beside me helping me) and also browse the info of others to see if there was anyone I would be interested in writing to. At one point I had 10 penpals going on (one from Japan I remeber, another from Michigan.. and maybe one from the UK? Not sure). Some lasted longer than others but I remember being

thrilled at making new friends and getting mail of my very own coming to the mailbox.

Mom and Dad did put their foot down on me writing to prisoners. I didn't think much about it back then though I knew why they said it. I don't blame them at all for being worried/concerned on that front.

Lida by chance happens upon Clarence looking for pen-pals, and decides to write to him... get some answers to what remains unsaid.

I was uneasy with what Lida was doing, I couldn't see any good coming from it. It felt like revenge from the get go to me and I wanted to yank her away from anywhere near that rabbit hole.

Pam, I found to be a bit of a brat at times. Yes, she's had a hard life and kept a certain thing to herself since she was a teen but I found her to be very unlikable at times. She almost didn't seem like a real person.

Also wish the relationship between Lida and Pam had been fleshed out more... it came across as stiff and weird at times.

One part near the end with Clarence surprised me at first but looking back on it, it does fit with his character. He got what he wanted from the one person, in that sense.

Overall the story is done very well, I got caught up easily in it. Not as hard hitting as you may think but still a fairly gripping story.

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## **Naomi says**

Disclaimer: I received this book for free through a Goodreads' giveaway.

3.5 stars out of 5.

I'm on the fence about whether or not I really like this book, or if it's just okay. I read it quickly, and became immersed in the story of Lida Stearl, her niece Pamela (whom she raised), and her brother-in-law Clarence Lusk (the murderer of her sister/Pamela's mother). For the first half of the novel, I sided entirely with Lida about pretty much everything. I was irritated with Pamela's behavior, and understood the decisions Lida made, no matter how strange or poorly thought out. However, as the story commenced, I began to view Lida in a different light. Rather than a martyr, who sacrificed her own life goals in order to raise her younger sister's daughter, I began to see her as someone who wanted to be viewed as a martyr and acted in whatever way necessary to make it so. Instead of her actions being altruistic overall, and for love of her niece and family, Lida starts to come across as a cold person herself.

I had to remind myself to feel sorry for Pamela, since she was a young kid when her mother was killed and her father was sent to jail. But she's not always easy to like (of course, this is based on how Lida reacts to and views her). This is one story where I'd have enjoyed seeing some of the interactions/situations from another viewpoint. This would add more depth to the story, as something of this nature is bound to be complicated.

I liked the writing, as it kept me engaged, moved quickly and smoothly, and was descriptive without being

too wordy (like me, I know I'm too wordy). The author does a good job of tackling a difficult topic, and shows how many different viewpoints there can be of the same situation, and how one act can change the lives of everyone connected no matter how remotely. The reader is forced to consider what's moral and what is not, and which deceptions are acceptable, if ever (particularly with some secrets that Lida and Pamela keep from one another, and blatant lies and manipulation on the part of Lida).

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### **Lynn says**

A man who brutally killed his wife and her lover, and a policeman, heads toward his last day in prison after 20 years of appeals. He has recently acquired an anonymous pen-pal, and the two of them are quickly sharing information, personal and impersonal. As the last appeal and the date for his execution draw closer, the family of the victims gathers to witness this closure and to hopefully find answers.

I read this DARC courtesy of Tyrus Books and Edelweiss. Pub date 11/04/16

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### **Lolly K Dandeneau says**

via my blog: <https://bookstalkerblog.wordpress.com/>

“We’d cremated her. Frank too. Everyone after Barbra, I cremated. The thought of another body in the ground. Still and wet, getting wetter. My horrible mind. I should have willed myself to sleep.”

Lida Stearl has never been able to move on from the murder of her sister Barbra at the hands of her brother in law, Clarence nor the fact that he once charmed her as much as anyone else. Always one to do what’s right and good, she fought to raise their daughter, Pam, the only child she and her husband Frank would ever have. Pam is grown now and creating a life for herself with her beloved husband Blue and his adoring family, her work with dogs. When she learns her brother-in-law is looking to connect with pen pals from his prison cell, the rot of an idea begins to take form. Apparently her “horrible mind” has fixated itself on Clarence, who certainly doesn’t deserve the “brightness of these fruits”, photos, memories connections to daughter Lida. She will see to it that his last days are torture to his mind, for he deserves no peace!

Lida’s anger is a poison she nurtures, what else is there to do with all her free days now that she’s widowed, alone. Revenge, a slip, a madness will make the ugliness inside of Lida rear it’s head. Clarence has always been orbiting Pam’s life, and his mother has lurked like a threat. Who is to blame for the terrible action Clarence chose, who suffers more than the survivors? Lida disgusts the reader just as much as the violent crime her brother in law committed. The reason is flimsy at best, but the reasoning behind most murders committed are. Clarence isn’t the only character full of guilt, but the bitterness inside of Lida is about more than her sister’s murder. How is the violence her heart harbors different that the anger Clarence was fueled by when he killed? We hate to think of comparisons to those who have committed the most heinous of acts.

She loved her sister, but Barbara had her flaws, her deceptions, her cunning and flippant ways. Lida slowly begins to shrivel inside, her hurt turns mean, getting in the way of the love she and her niece share. She is hungry to be the star in her heart, and is selfish of any lingering desire Pam has to know the father who has been locked away for much of her life. We’re not supposed to like this, because it’s ugly, and I thought of how such a situation is a reality for some people. How do you allow a relationship to grow between a child

you love and care for and the parent who murdered your loved one? It's a raw situation, it's the unimaginable. I suppose many people would deny said parent the right, but how does that effect the child?

Pam is in a difficult situation, wondering her whole life over if 'blood will tell', being told over and over of her goodness, but of course we are all a little like our parents, the good the bad and the ugly. We are all 'just people', and even the most foul among us has some kernel of decency if not goodness inside of us. Lida never wanted Pam to think for a moment she is anything like that man! Which will likely make a child compare herself even more, and inspire curiosity. Of course Pam hungers for her father into adulthood, but she surely can't do so freely without hurting her aunt who has been her only mother since the murder of her own. Lida would never stand for it, Lida sometimes forgets the horror wasn't hers alone, that not all decisions are hers to make. Lida creates a fake persona in letters between she and Clarence. Just what is her end goal? She plays at more than that when she begins to visit his mother. Oh how ugly she becomes, how closely she resembles hatred, the sort of hatred that spawns murderous ideas, that makes Lida a person as rotten as Clarence. It begs the question, just how low can any of us go if the circumstances push and pull on us?

Morality is always easy when you're never tested, isn't it? We all love to think we're good, we would do the right thing, but what do we know of our own hearts? I often thought, "good Lord Lida, you need to get a grip, your cruelty is showing." Something in her has soured, this inner struggle with self-blame, regrets, shame, and petty jealousy. She has been Pam's salvation, but hate is spoiling love. This is such a strange story, it is certainly more an examination of Lida than it is of Clarence's violent act. It's another form of victimization though too, Barbara was murdered but something was damaged inside of Lida and Clarence's mother too, punished and cut out of Pam's life simply for being the vessel that birthed a killer into the world.

I think it beautifully represents how insidious anger is. Lida spent so much time burying the pain over Barbara's murder to run her practice (she's an Orthodontist), raise her niece, and keep her marriage healthy that now in the quiet years of her life like the undead that buried anger is rising to the surface. Justice costs every family member, victims like dominoes. Clarence's execution date is looming, but Lida is imprisoned as much as he is. What will her plan teach her about herself?

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Gallery, Threshold, Pocket Books

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### **Jim Puskas says**

Skillfully written, well researched, emotionally and morally challenging. But in the end, I have to consider this book to be a failure because I found it impossible to care much about Lida the protagonist or even to accept her motives as being understandable under the circumstances. I don't consider her evil, but she is certainly selfish, vindictive, dishonest; and possibly psychotic. Exploring such a character in such depth says something about the author's mindset and what she wished to accomplish. There are two villains here and neither stands on solid ground to defend their actions. It doesn't help that there are a number of secondary characters who are hardly more appealing -- the semi-cognisant Marjorie, the cheating Barbra who started this whole mess, even the boisterous, annoying Claverie clan who gallop over everyone in their orbit. Finishing this book I found myself wanting to seek something sunny, honest and optimistic to cleanse my palate.

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## Gloria says

Recently widowed Lida Stearl just retired from a satisfying career and finds herself at loose ends dealing with decades of unresolved guilt and anger. Twenty years ago, her brother-in-law Clarence Lusk killed her sister, a lover, and a police officer. After numerous miscarriages, Lida and her husband had been given the gift of raising her niece as their own child, now a caring young woman married to a blind man with a large and rambunctious extended family.

Clarence is on death row nearing the end of his appeals when Lida discovers that Clarence is looking for someone to correspond with. Assuming a false identity as a young naïve woman, Lida and Clarence begin to send very personal letters, and Lida's anger grows. Somewhat obsessive, mildly manipulative and definitely prickly, Lida begins a steadily intensifying path of deception that negatively touches each person as his execution approaches.

Manaster writes a deeply human and morally saturated novel with captivating language. It is an utterly absorbing read which seems quiet at first, yet tension remains taut. This sympathetic novel examines how a tragic incident can irrevocably change a life's course.

Note: This review was prepared for *Library Journal*. (less)

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## Fran says

Aspects of this look at the aftermath of a murder were interesting from a psychological perspective. The characters were dark, difficult to like, but some of the emotions rang true.

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## Judy Collins says

A violent crime from years ago becomes front and center for Tracy Manaster's characters in **THE DONE THING** – a tragic event changes the course of lives and nothing will ever be the same. *How far will one woman go?*

Highly-charged, emotional, and frustrating at times. From obsession, hatred, and revenge to an attempt at forgiveness and acceptance. One life-altering event catapults a family into turmoil, revealing secrets and feeling that may leave them fractured forever.

**For eighteen years** and four appeals, Lida had waited. Each April she had petitioned. She despised the man, Clarence who had been responsible for putting her sister, Barbra in the ground. Clarence was the husband of Barbra and father of Pamela.

**Barbra had left her daughter Pamela behind.** Lida had raised Pam. Childless, she and Frank could not have children, and about the time their adoption came through, they had Pam to raise. Before they took custody he girl had spent exactly one weekend in her care.

Prior to her retirement at sixty, Lida was a successful orthodontist. Now Frank was gone, dead . . . and Pam was grown with a life of her own. Married and expecting.

**Lida now has more time** on her hands to obsess and scheme. She is bitter. She is angry. She wants Clarence to die. To suffer. “Clarence lingered, unshakable as the phantom weight a watch leaves on a naked wrist.”

She knew that once he died she could find new thoughts. She would love to serve him his last meal.

**Barbra’s lover.** Lawrence Richard Ring. Next Barbra fell, split apart by four bullets. Clarence had picked up Pamela and lied about a dentist appointment. Pamela was in the car. *Clarence had been granted three letters to Pamela a year.*

Presently, **Lida has turned sixty-three** and Pamela has purchased her a new computer. She comes up with a plan. She wants revenge. She discovers Clarence Lusk. Be a Penfriend. It’s the Write Thing. Be a Candle to Those in Darkness.

**The Prison in Arizona.** Inmate 58344. He wants a pen pal. She would change her name and set up a post office. She would be Maisie. Lida crosses a line and begins to write to Clarence. Pretending to be a flirty twenty-three-year-old, in an effort to attain retribution.

Will Clarence open up to her if he thinks she is someone else? Or will he be smart enough to catch her deception? *Will she lose control of the situation?*

*What is Pam thinking or feeling?* Does Lida consider her actions? Lida thinks she is always rushing to get married, hoping the baby would be born—before the needle. *The death of her father.*

**The author captures** every evil thought of this angry, manipulative, and lonely woman. The strained relationship between aunt and niece. Lida is so consumed by revenge has she forgotten the family in front of her. She dwells on everything bad in her life and chooses to believe this one man is at fault and to blame.

**The letters between Clarence and Lida** delve deep into the human emotions, and how deep the scars run after a tragedy that will forever change lives. How after years it begins to consume her.

**Scene (Chapter 35)** was well done and quite comical. The phone call and banter between the two. The claws come out.

The description summary from the publisher was right on – fans of Elizabeth Strout’s, Olive Kitteridge — complex; quite similar to the heavy mood of darkness, pain, and gloom. The internal war waging within. Human imperfections and family dynamics. Learning to let go and free oneself of anger.

However, the writing is well-crafted as the author explores the complex minds of humans in the midst of tragedy and the overwhelming need for justice. The consequences of this obsession are at the heart of **THE DONE THING**.

After reading three books in a row back to back, The Last Suppers(also death row), What Remains True ( the aftermath of a boy dying), and now **THE DONE THING**. Something a bit lighter with humor is in order.

**All three family dramas** are well-written books which teeter on literary fiction; however, they are deep,

dark, and sad. This is the type of book you may want to mix in among a few upbeat ones.

*A special thank you to Gallery Books and NetGalley for an advanced reading copy.*

JDCMustReadBooks

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### **Xena! says**

I found this book to be a page-turner, and finished it in a single reading. The major protagonist, Lida Stearl, is smart, pragmatic, and has just retired from a satisfying and respected career as an orthodontist. She has been a loving wife but is relatively recently widowed. Lida unfortunately has a very human flaw of tending towards manipulative behavior, has reasons to be a bit soured on life, and finds herself mildly bored. Her streak of maliciousness is focussed on her brother-in-law Clarence who is in the midst of his last appeal of his death sentence for the murder of his wife, Lida's younger sister.

Lida's manipulative tendency is awakened by a new encounter with the internet (the story is set in 2001 and the protagonist is 63 years of age, so uncovering the internet's power is exciting), when she discovers that Clarence is seeking a pen-pal. Lida develops a secret correspondence with him, posing as a young naive woman, in which she delights in subtly magnifying his fear of his death sentence being carried out. However, despite believing herself to be very careful, she loses control of the situation, jeopardizing the most important aspects of her life.

I found Lida, despite being flawed and indulging in extremely poor behavior at times, to be a sympathetic character. The premise of the story may seem melodramatic, but I assure you that it is not. The story does indeed have its dramatic moments which are well executed, but the strength of the book is in the unfolding of the characters. The word-play is wonderful, family scenes often frustrating but endearing, and the conclusion masterfully written. It never descends to pathos, but rather achieves entirely human moments.

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### **Melissa Duclos says**

This book is a touching portrayal of a woman attempting to deal with the murder of her sister. The narrator, Lida, is a prickly character for sure. She's angry and lonely, and she wants to see justice served. In the hands of a lesser writer, such a character might be difficult to spend 300 pages with. But Tracy Manaster is a master of voice and empathy. Lida comes to life in these pages, and her pain makes her real. I was swept away by the book, and couldn't put it down.

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### **Wit & Wonder Books says**

\*\*\* ARC received in exchange for an Honest review\*\*\*

Once in a while you will read a book that will humble you, inspire you and leave you in contemplation of your life, how you act and treat people to how you want to be treated. In *The Done Thing* by Tracy Manaster, you will feel all these things and more. You will be left with heavy thoughts, as the subject matter of this book is on the heavy side, emotionally charged and profound. My only drawback is the narrative of the story.

It crosses between the main character Lida speaking to Clarence, current conversations and her own internal thoughts but still told as if she is speaking/writing it to him. It was a little confusing and hard to keep up with.

This story genre, Fiction/Suspense is very different from what I am used to reading but I enjoyed it greatly. And everyone should read outside the box occasionally.

Lida, in her 60's, is an empty nester. She prides herself for her ability to know the most appropriate thing to do in any given situation. But now her niece has moved out and is starting her own life, her husband has passed, and she is retired. She is essentially alone. So, when Lida discovers that Clarence, her brother-in-law on death row for killing her sister, is seeking pen pals as his last appeal approaches, she crosses a line that should never be crossed in her obsession to find answers. As she moves forward with her quest for answers she finds it easier and easier to cross that line.

Lida's internal war with herself, her emotions, her sanity, it all becomes so real and that it speaks to you in one way or another. How little things can trigger emotions or memories, both good or bad. Learning how to let go and to forgive may take a long time, if it happens at all.

All in all, I enjoyed this complex story and even though the narrative of this story was complex for me, I would still recommend as it is a great read. Four compelling stars.

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