

Books & Authors

FICTION

'Balance Project' entertains, evokes thought

BY JAY STRAFFORD
Special correspondent

It's a novel. It's a book within that novel. It's the research series that gave birth to the novel and the book within that novel.

Confused? Do you even have time to think about it, given that your boss is on Line 1, your spouse on Line 2, your kid's nanny on Line 3 and your dad's nursing home on Line 4?

And if you think you're harried, just wait till you meet Lucy Cooper, the assistant to Katherine Whitney, both of whom are the key (and occasionally keyed-up) characters in Susie Orman Schnall's second novel, "The Balance Project."

Katherine, the chief operating officer of Green Goddess, a health and wellness company based in Manhattan, believes that women can have it all. She's 45, married to economist Theo Laurent and the mother of two young daughters. Cel-

JUNIOR LEAGUE OF RICHMOND BOOK & AUTHOR EVENT

When: 7 p.m. Wednesday; Susie Orman Schnall is one of the featured authors.

Where: Greater Richmond Convention Center, 403 N. Third St.

Tickets: \$75 individual ticket includes dinner; \$30 gallery ticket does not include dinner; other ticket levels are available.

Info: (804) 643-4886 or www.bookandauthorevent.org

ebrated for her accomplishments, she seems to have a perfect life.

Lucy, who narrates the message-driven novel, doesn't. Loyal to a fault to Katherine, she rarely has time for herself, telling us that the world of Green Goddess is busier "than the chardonnay line at a Michael Bolton concert." And her relationship with her boyfriend, sports agent Nick Heston, is suffering.

Something, or someone, has to give — and it's not Katherine, whose self-absorption leads her to milk Lucy's loyalty and then commit an act of selfish sabotage.

Occasionally funny and always focused — although a tad pat and a bit predictable — "The Balance Project" entertains while simultaneously provoking serious thought.

And Schnall — whose interviews with women about their work-life balance led to this novel — makes her point.

But just as photography need not be limited to black and white, neither does fiction — nor life. Until death stills our hearts, we remain open to the potential for change. And Schnall allows her characters to envision, explore and possibly effect alternatives.

All of us face the challenges of the disparate demands of our personal and professional lives, which sometimes seem mutually exclusive and simultaneously overwhelming. Schnall's novel provides a backdrop for evaluating happiness, for her readers as well as



THE BALANCE PROJECT

Susie Orman Schnall
273 pages, SparkPress, \$16

her characters.

So can you have it all? That's up to you, and to how you define "all."

"The Balance Project" offers insight as you ponder.

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NONFICTION