

## Room to Read Book Group Report by Annie Clouston – March 2023

This month we discussed ***Lessons in Chemistry*** by Bonnie Garmus, a book that has, both in hardback and paperback, been at the top of the fiction best seller lists in 2023, I would say deservedly. It is a bravura performance of wit and story-telling.

The heroine is Elizabeth Zott (not to be confused with Violet Elisabeth Bott, though she shares some of her characteristics), an extraordinary character who finds her career as a research chemist in 1950s America is constantly sabotaged by sexism and the limited (to marriage and motherhood) expectations of the era. She is sexually assaulted by a male academic (her teacher) and when she reports this to the police, surprise, surprise, it turns out that her attacker rather than she is treated as the victim. When she does get a job in a lab, she is told to be grateful that she is even allowed to be a technician, while less able male colleagues steal the kudos of her results. She falls in love, and she and Calvin and a dog named Six-Thirty, exist in a romantic bubble, burst tragically by Calvin's death when he is run over by a car. Elizabeth is pregnant, a state that she has shunned and remains in denial about until she can deny it no more when out pops Madeline.

The novel is the story of Elizabeth Zott, Mad, and Six-Thirty, a dog who manages to learn the meaning of at least 750 words, and a cast of sympathetic supporters. Elizabeth becomes a highly popular TV cook with literally a revolutionary approach when she can no longer sustain her employment in the lab because of the moralistic and patriarchal attitudes of the times (she was an unmarried mother). She exacts a glorious revenge on her persecutors – and that's why you should read the book!.

I loved this book because it made me hoot with laughter over and over again. My fellow readers had some criticisms that I will allow – it could have been edited to fewer pages, it was somewhat contrived, it was certainly not a novel to win over the patriarchy (but who cares about that?) and though we loved Six-Thirty his way of being was very fanciful. Overall we were glad to have read it and would want others to. 5 stars for Book Group discussion and 4.5 to recommend to friends.