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## Book Review - 'Purity' by Jackson Pearce

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## Off the SHELF

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***Purity*** by Jackson Pearce.

Little, Brown, 2012. ISBN 978-0-31618-246-1 Price: \$17.99

The new novel *Purity*, from Atlanta-based Jackson Pearce, is a stunner. Anyone who's familiar with the Young Adult genre won't be too shocked by the book's main subject, losing one's virginity (insert audible gasp here!). For the rest of you, don't worry—*Purity* is about much, much more.

Let's just put aside the fact that it's about sex for a moment. The themes that have the biggest impact on the reader are actually about dealing with loss and being true to yourself. The main character, Shelby, is a teen who has lost her mother and lives by the promises she made to her in her last moments. Shelby struggles with what she sees as a contradiction between two of them—listening to her father and living without restraint.

Shelby's dad has volunteered them to help plan the daddy-daughter "Princess Ball," (something she wants to refuse at all costs), but Shelby feels compelled to honor her mother's wishes and, in turn, her father's. Throughout the course of dance lessons gone wrong and cake tastings, they reluctantly start to build the foundation for the relationship they've never had.

Spirituality is infused throughout the work as Shelby questions why God lets bad things happen. She wonders if she's the only one who can't quite get a grasp on the faith she longs for—a faith that seems to come so easily to all of the other girls attending the Princess Ball. She reaches to God for help with the unanswerable questions in her life. Pearce expresses this struggle well, and I appreciate that Shelby doesn't always find the answers she seeks.

Even though I enjoyed *Purity*, it's not entirely without weaknesses. While the main characters were well developed, some members of the supporting cast were a bit stereotypical. What I did enjoy was the careful development of a sensitive story. *Purity* takes the reader through some tough issues, but rewards them with a fun, heartening tale of a girl reconnecting with herself and the ones she loves.

For those who may be concerned about recommending a YA novel about sex to younger teens, *Purity* is not kinky and doesn't encourage bad behavior. It's not a romance novel at heart. It's an honest look that contextualizes what this important coming-of-age milestone means to a girl's life. It reminds readers to live by the other promise Shelby made to her mother—to love as much as possible.

*Ginger Williams is outreach services librarian at Odum Library, Valdosta State University.*