



Extensions

Myrna Dey

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When she makes the chance discovery of a framed sepia photograph of her grandmother and her twin sister, RCMP Constable Arabella Dryvynsydes decides to investigate how a picture taken in 1914 in the mining town of Extension, B.C. wound up at a garage sale in small-town Saskatchewan almost one hundred years later. As Arabella sifts through caches of long-forgotten letters and unearths long-buried memories, she pieces together the heartbreakingly true story of her family history and resolves a nearly century-old murder. In her debut novel, Myrna Dey skillfully moves back and forth between two time periods and two memorably resourceful heroines.

Extensions Details

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Juanita says

The main character of this book is a sympathetic RCMP Constable, who ventures into her family's past as she goes about her day job. It was interesting to have an unstereotypical police officer, even if the writing did get a bit syrupy at times. I loved the Canadian details of this book. I wish that the author hadn't included the Kubik case into the plot, as it bogged down the book just when I wanted it to keep moving. That said, if you read this book with a little more patience than I had, you will still find this part interesting.

Nicole says

Read this book and found it very interesting. I did find it a little hard to get into but once I did I enjoyed getting to know the character of Jane Hughes. I think though I had a great connection to make since my mother is a twin and I got a better insight to the book because of it. I think it is worth a least giving it a read.

Kerry says

Boring prairie lit.

Chris says

I loved the contrast between the choices the two main characters have in their lives. The immigrant girl from Wales had no choice at all. She had to leave the school she loved to work as a drudge and take care of her family. The modern woman who is an RCMP officer has so many choices she is having trouble deciding what to make of her life. And through all this you learn a little about 18th century immigrant life in western Canada.

Sarah says

Easy enough read, but confusing at time with all the dead uncle's brother's children's children and such. Way too many relatives to keep straight, and most not really that important to the story. Boring at times, but overall a decent read.

Gwen says

I rated this book before I finished it (not recommended), and found that overall I had to lower my rating. I leave others to come to their own conclusions, because I still think it was a worthwhile read, especially if you

are interested in that part of Canada and its history.

Katie says

This is one of four new releases from NeWest Press that I won in a silent auction. This book, like two others (After Alice and The Paradise Engine), is a first novel by a woman writer based in and about BC.

It seems like all three authors went to the same how-to-write-a-novel workshop, which included the ideas of a multigenerational family, dark secrets revealed by archival material, and a female protagonist with a highly distinctive name. And the latter because it's the only way to distinguish her from the other, somewhat one-dimensional characters.

This was in my opinion, is the weakest of the three offerings, even though the writer has more publication credits than the other two. She's been published in Reader's Digest, and unfortunately her writing is of that pedestrian level. I couldn't care about the characters, and the book was too long to support the rather flimsy and obvious plot. Yes, I'll admit I flipped to the end to find out, rather than read the whole thing.

Also: You don't have to write a novel of 350 pages just because that's the standard length. You don't have to write a novel at all, if you're better at short stories.

Go read Paradise Engine instead. You won't necessarily be satisfied by that book, but it is far more interesting.

HelenJ says

Neat when you know the setting so well, and get drawn into the characters!

Lorraine says

I almost put the book down during the first chapter, because the writing was cheesy -- expected descriptions about appearances and connections and dialogue that was not realistic because there was so much openness and ease discussing very personal, sensitive topics. And who can have such a conversation over dinner with two little kids at the table? Not in my experience.

The writing gets better, for the most part. It occasionally flatlines again, but is interspersed with enough reasonable writing that I didn't get too upset. There are certainly golden moments, and the inconsistency makes me wonder if the book was written over a very long period of time and that some sections -- like the intro -- were harder for the author to write or added at the end to satisfy an editor.

The juxtaposition of the two stories, the historical and the contemporary, does create some interesting perspective on BC's history, especially for people who know the area well. I did find it weird to know the whole story when the narrator had only pieces. Also, there was so much build up of the solved murder mystery and the exciting use of the primary sources for the history term paper that I felt let down when the abduction case took centre stage. It was like that storyline became too burdensome and the new one took its place so that the theme of family ties and babies could be highlighted.

The other part I found odd was that the narrator (author?) was so accepting of every ethnicity and way of thinking, especially new age, EXCEPT Christianity, which gets ridiculed in Laura's character. That was a skewed version of tolerance.

Oh, one more thing: the photo on the front cover is NOTHING like the described photo in the book. I wish artists would at least read the book if they are designing a jacket for it.

Christine says

This book pulled me in during the first chapter. I think the author did a good job of weaving the past in with the present. Bella was a believable character. She had flaws but remained very likable.

I spent a great many years doing genealogy on my own family. From that, I can say that sometimes things do fall into place with a series of coincidences that to some would seem impossible.(I went from finding that I had a half sister to meeting her by accident half a country away in under 3 months without either of us looking). Reading this story reminded me of that. Watching as Jane's story unfolded, followed by that of Sara and Janet was well written into what was going on in present day life with Bella.

I enjoyed reading about some of the history of British Columbia. I admit coming from eastern Canada, I know very little about the details of BCs' past, although I've called it home for more than a decade. I've since reserved a couple of books at the library to learn more. Myrna Dey managed to weave some history lessons into the story, and while the details of the lives in the book were a work of fiction, I can see them happening.

Allison says

I thought the book was enjoyable. I found that it had a lot of extra characters that it really didn't need to have. I had to go back in the book sometimes to find out how a character was connected to ALL the other characters. Also I found myself feeling more interested in the dead characters in the book rather than the ones alive.

Ann says

well done intertwining of two stories -- present policewoman and past (her great-grandmother) living in B.C. mining community. Dey weaves facts with feelings well and her collection of Arabella's relatives are fun in themselves. The horror of the Spanish Flu at the end of WWI is memorable as is the hard work of everyday life for a woman of that time period.

Doreen says

This book caught my attention because it was The Reader's Choice for the Scotiabank Giller Prize.

Arabella Dryvynsydes, an RCMP officer, feels adrift after the death of her mother and a romantic breakup. By chance she finds a photograph of her grandmother and her twin sister at a garage sale in rural Saskatchewan. Arabella sets out to discover how the photo, taken 100 years earlier on Vancouver Island, found its way there. She also acquires a few letters written by her great-grandmother to her siblings in Wales, letters in which she describes the poverty and loneliness of life in a Vancouver Island mining town. Gradually Arabella uncovers family secrets as she also solves crime cases.

A problem with the book is the many chance occurrences and coincidences. The plot seems less driven by character than by a plot graph developed by the author. All of Arabella's encounters and experiences connect somehow to her search for information about her maternal ancestors. For example, she takes a history course, although she had never previously shown much interest in academics, and, conveniently, she is able to use her great-grandmother's letters for a term paper and eventually to solve a historical mystery. One of the letters, to which she gains access only towards the end of the book, helps her to solve a murder she is investigating.

Many of the characters are sketched in broad strokes and are unconvincing. People keep secrets and fabricate lies with insufficient motivation to justify their actions. A couple of great-aunts are totally vindictive and malicious and seem to have no redeeming qualities, while another is too good to be true. Several relatives are so lacking in ordinary human curiosity that they don't read family documents bequeathed to them; that total lack of interest means secrets remain buried even longer, only to be uncovered by Arabella of course.

The theme is rather obvious: "we are never as far removed from one another as we like to think" (247). In case the reader fails to understand, an explanation is given: "And what was I but an extension, through Dad, of [my paternal grandmother]. Just as this elderly cousin coasted on what her mother had gone through and passed on, so were our comfortable lives determined by what [my grandmother] had borne, distilled, and set in motion . . ." (245).

I did enjoy reading about the history of mining on Vancouver Island; about this history I knew virtually nothing, and the book has inspired me to do some further research.

The mechanical construction of the plot and the flawed characterization leave no doubt that this is a debut novel. It may have won the Reader's Choice Award, but I suspect that win was more the result of an organized voting campaign than the literary merits of the book itself.

Please check out my blog (<http://schatjesshelves.blogspot.ca/>) and follow me on Twitter (@DCYakabuski).

Miz Moffatt says

Originally posted on Across the Litoverse

a garage sale detour in a small Saskatchewan town, RCMP Constable Arabella Dryvynsydes discovers a duplicate photograph of her paternal grandmother, Sara, and her late twin sister among the stacks of old tokens for sale. After losing her mother one year earlier, and after the recent dissolution of a long-term relationship, Arabella craves a new project to focus on in a bid to forget the stinging wounds of recent months. How did a photograph taken in the mining town of Extension, B.C., wind up in a stranger's

possession one hundred years later? And what implications does this hold for Arabella's present life?

As she sifts through a packet of long-forgotten letters and traces her roots back through the oral testimonies of her aunt and father, Arabella revives the memory of her great-grandmother, Jane Owens, and uncovers the dark secrets Jane took to her grave. One part detective novel and one part CanLit historical narrative, **Extensions** explores one woman's quest to understand her origins while resolving a century-old murder case. All in a day's work for the RCMP, n'est-ce pas?

Sadly, **Extensions** was rife with numerous issues for me: Jane Owens' narrative (by far the most compelling part of the book) was often hijacked by the mundane doings of Arabella's life; characters' names and relationships were convoluted and difficult to follow without a visualized family tree (i.e. try sorting out a Jane, Janet, and Janetta or a Lewellyn and Llewellyn); and **Myrna Dey**'s representations of minority groups were often limiting and distressing—I wasn't clear if this was meant to show a small mindedness in Arabella, or if the comments were...uh, serious.

I would advocate skipping **Extensions** unless you're aiming to read through the 2011 Scotiabank Giller Prize longlist like me.

Mar says

i liked this book quite a bit. the plot moves between the present in vancouver/vancouver island and the late 1800's in the same areas. i found it was well written and i hope to read more books by this author.
