

What did you do in the war, Grandma?

Mystery novel probes our past

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

As our population ages and events recede ever further into the past, more and more veterans are hearing from their kids and grandkids: *what did you do during the war?* That question takes on an increasing urgency each year, as fewer and fewer survivors remain to tell the tale. This week's pick helps to shed light on one aspect of those troubled times.

Emma Cole

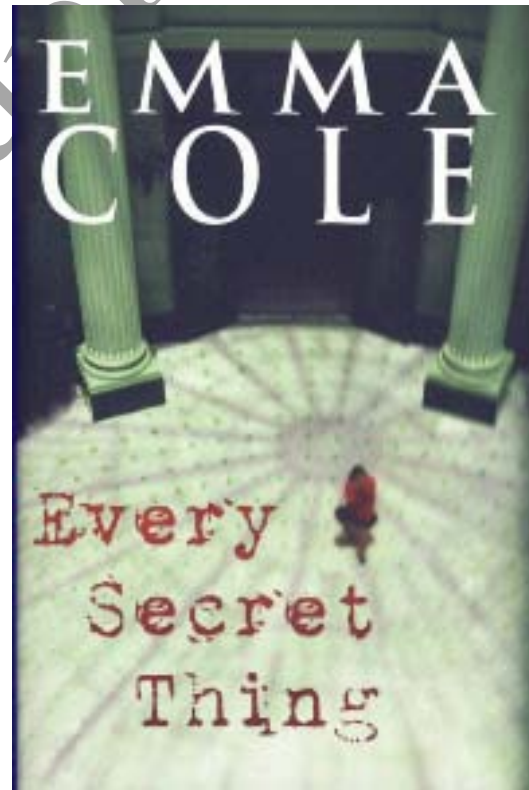
If you Google the Canadian writer Emma Cole you might be forgiven for thinking that she is an emerging writer, and that *Every Secret Thing* is her debut novel.

You'd be wrong. As Susanna Kearsley, she has an impressive list of novels to her credit, including *Undertow*, *The Gemini Game*, *Mariana* (which won the Catherine Cookson Literary Prize for 1993), *The Splendour Falls*, *The Shadowy Horses*, *Named of the Dragon*, *Season of Storms*, and *The Winter Sea*, (published in the UK as *Sophia's Secret*). Since most of these novels have a paranormal thread, she has taken the *nom de plume* of Emma Cole for her most recent work, which, though firmly grounded in history, is entirely of this world.

A former museum curator, it's not surprising that Susanna has an interest in history; in each of her earlier novels she has focused on the theme of how the present is inextricably bound up with the

past. Her latest novel is no exception. More than a World War II saga, it peels back yet another layer about the clandestine world of Allied intelligence and the special contribution that Canadian women made to that effort. It is a cat-and-mouse thriller, intricately crafted by a natural storyteller, and a fine read.

Susanna and her husband Ken live just outside Toronto with their two children, aged nine and six, and an ancient cockapoo.



Every Secret Thing

(Allison & Busby, 2006)

Kate Murray is a Canadian journalist in her mid-twenties covering a murder trial in London, England. During a break in the trial she is sipping a coffee on the steps of St. Paul's Cathedral when she is approached by an elderly stranger named Andrew Deacon. He tells her that he knew her grandmother, and then mentions that he, too, knows of a murder – a very old one. Pre-occupied with filing her story, Kate puts him off. He hands her his card, and suggests they might meet over dinner to discuss his case. Then he walks away, toward the street, leaving her to her work.

Kate is intrigued. How does this man know his grandmother, who lives in Canada? But before she can catch up to him, he is hit by a car, which speeds off. A crowd gathers, and someone checks the old man's pulse and shakes his head. He is dead.

She barely knew the man. Only his name, and that one brief conversation. It niggles at her, the way she was so dismissive, and with a man who said he knew her grandmother so many years ago. A few days later Kate attends his funeral, in the small village in Hampshire where he had lived. There she meets Deacon's nephew, James Cavender, who reveals a bit of the old man's past. He had worked in New York during World War II for a famed multimillionaire, curating his considerable art collection. He had married, then moved to Lisbon to work for Reynolds, leaving his bride in New York for safety. His wife, Cavender added, had died the following Spring, and Deacon had returned home.

Kate wonders why the old man had sought her out. His nephew confides that shortly before his death Deacon had

received a call from Whitehall that had angered him. Realising he'd been wasting his time with government bureaucrats, he'd mentioned that he knew of a reporter, a young Canadian woman, who could be trusted. He had decided to approach her with the story.

But of course before he could speak with her, he'd been killed.

Cavender gives Kate his uncle's letters, but before she's had a chance to look at them she's approached by another man, identifying himself as a detective from Scotland Yard. He warns Kate that the letters are highly sensitive, and that publishing them could be a violation of the Official Secrets Act, for which she could be prosecuted. Kate is incensed, but putting her temper on hold, decides to speak with her grandmother on her return to Canada.

And therein lies the tale. As Kate unravels the puzzle surrounding Andrew Deacon she makes astonishing discoveries about her grandmother, and her work during the war. More people will die, and Kate will travel to Lisbon and back again in search of the truth, overtaken by events and pursued by someone who isn't even supposed to be alive.

***A tale of intrigue and deceit,
grounded in fact***

Think John Le Carré, rather than Ian Fleming. A spy thriller that does not rely on larger-than-life superheroes or improbably sophisticated gadgets, *Every Secret Thing* is a well-paced tale of intrigue and deceit, firmly grounded in fact. It is also an exceptionally fine story of ordinary men and women who find themselves in extraordinary circumstances, burdened with responsibilities beyond their tender years, and facing challenges for which no training could adequately prepare them. It is a com-

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elling story, told with polish and confidence, and readers will want to read much more of her work. Happily, a sequel to *Every Secret Thing* is in the works, this time set in Greece.

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