

Molly's Back!

Delany's latest her best yet

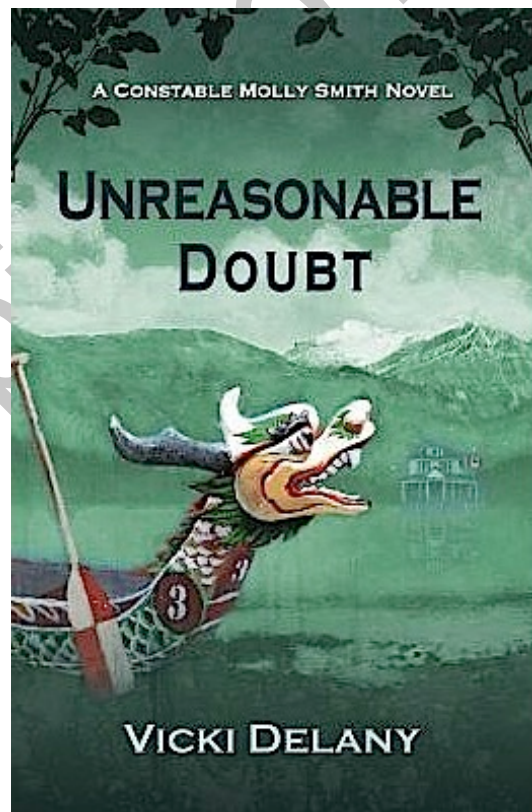
Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

It's been a couple of years since readers have been treated to a new Constable Molly Smith tale from Vicki Delany, but that's not to say she's been idle. In the interim the talented Canadian novelist has launched not one, but two new series, both cozies, bringing her total literary output to nearly two dozen series or standalone works, while also performing her duties as president of the Crime Writers of Canada. One gets the impression that in her spare time Vicki Delany juggles chainsaws just to keep her life interesting.

The wait hasn't been in vain. Delany's tenth and latest foray into the goings-on in the mountain resort town of Trafalgar BC finds the community once again embroiled in controversy, as the return of a former resident stirs up old memories and bitter feelings and threatens to expose a dark chapter of

Trafalgar's past.



Walt Desmond is returning home. He's been imprisoned for twenty-five years, convicted of sexually assaulting and brutally murdering a twenty-two-year-old woman, Sophia D'Angelo, in 1991. But a recent appeal has resulted in his conviction being over-

turned, the result, it seems, of shoddy investigative work on the part of the Trafalgar City Police Department.

Some residents are unconvinced. They see Walt's release as merely another example of clever lawyers manipulating the legal system for their own ends. Within the Trafalgar PD the conflict is especially heated, as people line up on both sides of the dispute. And the tension only rises when it becomes clear that Walt has returned looking for answers.

Police Chief Paul Keller and Detective Sergeant John Winters attempt to keep a lid on things, pointing out that as Desmond's conviction was overturned, he has every right to return to Trafalgar. But when a woman—Winters' own wife—and then another—are assaulted, suspicion lands squarely on Desmond, and even career officers want to take matters into their own hands. And lurking in the background is one of the original investigating officers in the D'Angelo murder, a troubled man with strong feelings of his own.

From its outset in 2007 the Constable Molly Smith series has been a strong contender,

with its engaging cast of characters, atmospheric settings, and well-structured plots. But in *Unreasonable Doubt* Delany has ramped her work up a notch: the writing is more self-assured, the treatment of the characters is more nuanced, and the narrative nicely builds toward the climax. Delany's latest work can hold its own against anything in the genre being published today. Witness the evocative opening passage of *Unreasonable Doubt*:

Walter Desmond felt something move, something low in his belly that he might once have recognized as happiness. It had been many years since he'd known what happiness felt like. He gazed out the window of the bus, full of wonder. The mountains were so high, the slopes closing in on the highway, their ragged tops still white with snow even though it was July. In the valleys, lakes and rivers sparkled blue in the sunlight.

A shade of blue he'd forgotten could exist.

Adding to its literary merits Delany's exploration of a significant and complex social

theme, and *Unreasonable Doubt* is clearly her strongest

work to date, and worth the wait.

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Since 2005 Jim Napier's reviews and interviews have appeared in several Canadian newspapers and on such websites as *Spinetinger*, *The Rap Sheet*, *Shots Magazine*, *Crime Time*, *Reviewing The Evidence*, *January* magazine, the *Montreal Review of Books*, the *Ottawa Review of Books*, and *Amazon.com*, as well as on his own award-winning crime fiction site, *Deadly Diversions*. He can be reached at jnapier@deadlydiversions.com

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