

Barbie with a gun?

Policewoman must prove her worth

Suspended Sentences

by Jim Napier

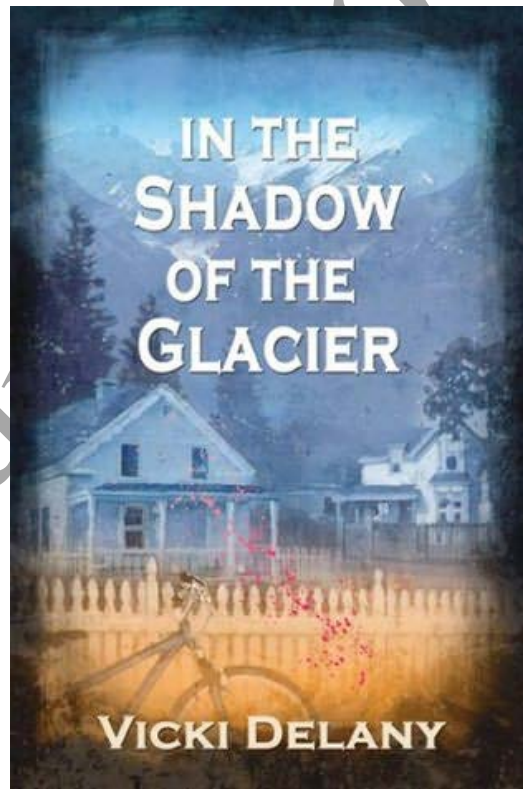
Plot versus theme: it's one of the more basic distinctions in a writing class. Simple enough, in theory. Plot describes the sequence of events that makes up the story; theme concerns the author's stance, or take, on those events. It might be approving, or disapproving, or simply neutral. Think of a storyline concerning a doctor faced with deciding whether to euthanise a patient: does he or she do it, or not? And if not, is it because it's the right thing to do, or because the doctor fears being prosecuted? It's in such decisions that the tale hangs in the balance.

This week's pick turns on this distinction between plot and theme. It is about a young female police officer in a small town. She struggles to prove her worth, and finds herself in danger of being overwhelmed by events. On one level it can be read as a story about stereotyping and gender discrimination, and it certainly is that; but it's also a story about family, about grown children and their parents and generational differences; and it's also about coming to terms with the personal tragedies we all face. And, underneath all of that, it is simply a good tale well told.

Vicki Delany

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Vicki Delany was raised mostly in Ontario. Shortly before graduating from Carleton

University she left her studies to travel to South Africa, where she subsequently



met a man and married him. The couple had three daughters, and eleven years later Delany and her family returned to Canada.

Until recently a systems analyst at a major Canadian bank, Vicki Delany is one gutsy lady. She did what many aspiring writers only dream about, but few find the courage to do: she quit her secure nine-to-five job to devote her full energies to writing and travelling

throughout North America in order to promote her latest book. Her self-confidence seems to have been justified: the *Chicago Tribune* has called the BC-based author one of the most promising of new Canadian crime writers.

In the Shadow of the Glacier is Delany's third crime novel. Her previous stand-alones include *Burden of Memory* and *Scare the Light Away*.

***In the Shadow of the Glacier*
(Poisoned Pen Press, 2007)**

Constable Molly Smith is a young police officer in the mid-Kootenay town of Trafalgar, BC. Newly appointed, she is facing with the challenge of working among people she grew up with, most of whom see her as an ex-schoolmate and a friend, rather than as an officer of the law. It doesn't help that her ex-hippie parents named her Moonbeam, or that a chauvinistic colleague dismisses her as a Barbie with a gun. Still coming to terms with her fiancé's death less than a year ago, Molly struggles to find respect among the townspeople and peace in her own troubled life.

On the surface, Trafalgar is an idyllic village, transgressions of the law mostly limited to people walking their dogs where prohibited and the occasional bicycle theft. But beneath the surface are ominous signs of big-city problems. Molly's best friend is being stalked by her ex-boyfriend, who seems increasingly out of control. And thirty years on, divisions over the Viet Nam War are bubbling to the surface in the community, its isolation only serving to magnify the tensions.

The tranquility of the village is shattered when local developer Reg Montgomery is found dead in an alley, his head bashed in. The kind of guy people either

loved or hated, Reg and his business partner were planning to build a new resort nearby, one that would bring in hoards of tourists (and their plastic), but which some locals saw as threatening the identity of the quiet rural town, and endangering local wildlife as well. Reg was well known for his opposition to plans for a commemorative peace garden to be located on land bequeathed to the town by an ex-draft-resister who had recently died. The town had polarized over the project, some residents seeing it as a worthy tribute to the cause of peace, others as a slap in the face to those who had served their country and paid the ultimate price.

The situation is not helped when an ambitious local reporter teams up with an American cable news network to exploit the controversy surrounding the plan for the peace park. The anchorman arrives in town with his own agenda, forged partly from his attitude toward draft dodgers and partly from his own driving ambition to find a good story or, if necessary, make one up.

Not least there is Reg's not-so-grieving widow, who makes no attempt to conceal the fact that she had been having an affair with the town's dentist. His alibi for the time of Reg's death leaves, as they say, something to be desired.

In short, there is no shortage of motives or suspects for Reg Montgomery's death. When Molly is assigned to help newly-arrived detective John Winters to help unravel the tangled skein of village life, she is elated. Finally: an opportunity to show her mettle. Winters, however, has his own demons to lay to rest.

It's idyllic façade masking Trafalgar's entrenched attitudes and growing tensions, by the time the secrets of this tiny community are laid bare a most

unlikely killer will be revealed, and Molly will be literally fighting for her life.

Will resonate with readers

It is always a pleasure to discover a talented new writer, and such is the case with Vicki Delany. *In the Shadow of the Glacier* is a well-crafted story that will resonate with readers who have confronted the discrimination and obstacles facing her protagonist, Molly Smith. Delany also has a gift for conveying a strong sense of place, whether she is describing the physical isolation of a small community in the mountains or the time-warp enveloping a group of aging hippies still fighting battles over long-forgotten issues. Not least, she convincingly portrays the havoc that can ensue when a scheming, ambitious reporter tosses journalistic ethics to the winds in favour of a good story. It is an enjoyable read, one that can be appreciated on a number of levels, and should win the emerging author legions of fans.

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