



Anna From Away

D.R. MacDonald

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When Anna Starling flees a dissolving marriage in California to save herself and her artistic career in Cape Breton, her life intersects with that of Red Murdock, a cabinetmaker who has recently lost the great love of his life, Rosaire. Surrounded by old ghosts and echoes of those who once lived in this isolated, now depleted community, Anna and Murdock discover that the present is inextricably linked with the past, and that both can lead to moral dilemmas. How grave is sexual betrayal? Who is behind the bale of marijuana that washes up on Anna's shore, and what should she, an outsider, and Murdock, rooted in this place and attracted to her, do about it? Can Anna and Murdock ever overcome the pain of the past?

Part erotic love story, part quest for home and heart, *Anna From Away* is a superbly crafted tale of love after love, a novel rich in atmosphere and infused with lyrical descriptions of land and sea. Written with an ear for the cadences of Cape Breton and a profound understanding of the many emotional shadings that exist between the sexes, this novel is another superb work from D.R. MacDonald.

Anna From Away Details

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From Reader Review Anna From Away for online ebook

Rod says

I love MacDonald's style of writing - so descriptive. Another great story I really enjoyed - will be reading more of his.

Bonnie says

The Ice Bridge by D.R. Macdonald starts slowly but builds to a wonderful overall effect. Anna Starling's marriage is ending in California and she wants to go to an isolated area and continue her painting undisturbed. She goes online and chooses a house on isolated Cape Breton. At first, she stays to herself, but slowly meets people she grows fond of. Her property abuts that of Red Murdock whose family owns the house she rents. Much time is given to his past relationship with Rosaire who had recently died from cancer. Anna paints better than she has for a long time and slowly she forms a relationship with Red. Surrounded by the ghosts of the indigenous Scottish culture that once thrived here, Anna and Red come together just as the modern world finds Cape Breton in the way of illegal drugs. Anna finds a bail of marijuana that had washed up on the beach and hides it in a cellar under the house. The novel is rich in atmosphere and filled with lyrical descriptions. I started reading with trepidation and finished with respect for the wonderful novel Macdonald created.

Lauren Carter says

Every sentence in this book is beautiful. The descriptions and details bring to life the tiny Cape Breton village of Cape Seal, its century-old seaside houses and, especially, the botany and natural details of the area. For that: three stars. Where it fell down for me was the story.

I found that the characters spent too much time alone, thinking about their lives. Some of this was good and added to our understanding of them but there was a bit too much of Red, grieving.

Throughout the first half or so some of the chapters end with italicized memories from secondary characters which I found confusing. I wasn't sure what their recollections had to do with the plot, which was primarily focused on the two main characters, Anna and Red Murdock.

In addition, I found Anna's motivation confusing, especially her choice at the end with the item (which I will not reveal) that she is so adamant about holding for herself.

The book seemed undeveloped to me in terms of the story-line. I kept reading because of the incredible beauty of the prose but a less talented writer would have lost me early on.

Harpercollins Canada says

Set in Cape Breton, *Anna From Away* is a tale of love after love. It is about nostalgia for the old ways and the identity of the people who live on the island.

It is the story of loss, with a tantalizing love story thrown in.

Krista says

Starlings are not native to Canada, having been introduced by the Acclimation Society of North America in the 1800s in order to transplant to the U.S. every bird species found in Shakespeare's plays. Although they have acclimated very well -- thousands of them even spending their winters in snow-covered Canada -- many consider starlings to be a pest species, crowding out the native birds and causing a nuisance with their noise and waste. Interesting choice then for D. R. MacDonald to name his female lead, the California artist who flees her broken marriage for the isolation of Cape Breton, Anna *Starling*.

The *Ice Bridge* (also known as *Anna From Away*) is a meditation on loss and solitude told from the shifting perspective of two characters: Anna Starling and Red Murdoch -- a life-long resident of the area who is mourning the recent death of his one great love, Rosaire. The two are an interesting contrast: Anna's loneliness could be attributed to her own choices (a weak commitment to her marriage and a desire to run away) while Murdoch's is heart-wrenching (he took loving care of Rosaire as she wasted away from a brain tumour). They muse on and then discuss the failings of their own parents' marriages and it's interesting to consider that Murdoch had enjoyed the strongest relationship, though he and Rosaire had never married (or even lived together). They both find redemption through their art (Murdoch in his carpentry shop and forge and Anna with her drawings), and they also find healing in nature while acknowledging that the unspoiled surroundings were at risk of change: with no local economic opportunities, many residents were renting out family homes as summer cottages or selling outright to foreigners, while some of the younger folks, those who don't move away, consider riskier business (view spoiler).

MacDonald's prose is lovely and lyrical, and especially when describing nature scenes, but the plot here was a little thin to me -- these were two unequal griefs and Anna's casual attitudes towards sex and drugs, along with her unrepentant disloyalties, made her fairly unlikeable; too much the pesky starling amongst the domestic sparrows. In Breagh, however, is a glimmer of hope -- she bridges the generations, remaining loyal to her roots while fashioning Celtic-themed clothes for the summer tourists to buy (and it's interesting, again, that she doesn't need a man in her life to get along).

Although *The Ice Bridge* updates many of the same themes, I much preferred MacDonald's Cape Breton Road, and insofar as it tells a similar tale of criminal enterprise, I preferred the plot of Lisa Moore's *Caught*.

Alison DeLory says

A decent sense of foreboding but a bit slow to boil for me.

Dorianne Emmerton says

Perfectly typical Canlit. Lots of nature, harsh winter followed by the respite of spring in an isolated location, taciturn hard drinking men suffering loss and the women who depend on them. Things got a bit more interesting when the drugs showed up but ultimately there was no payoff.

Megan says

I found that this book took me a long time to get into and even then I didn't really find the plot or the characters memorable. Just an ok read.

Delilah Trenaman says

I really enjoyed the way the author incorporated the local speech into the dialog.

Joy (joyous reads) says

In an effort to start anew after her marriage died a quiet death, Anna took off to the isolated little coastal town of Cape Seal. Surrounded by the waning winter and a timid spring, she attempted to resuscitate her art, reinvent the old Anna, and fill in the blanks of what had happened to her marriage. She found inspiration everywhere and solitude that brought forth memories of a marriage gone sour. Some days, the little town offered her solace but it also magnified the loneliness that crept up as the winter cold refused to leave. In the midst of her soul-searching and self-doubts, she found assistance from an unlikely source to help her pick up the pieces of her shattered self-esteem.

Fraught with grief over the loss of his beloved, Red Murdock's days consisted of drunken stupors and regrets. But for the first time since Rosaire's death, sparks of life started to bloom and it's all thanks to the resident of his former childhood home. But moving on is not that easy especially if you're plagued with guilt for a love that slowly deteriorated like that of Rosaire's health.

This is another one of my attempts to venture out of YA. It's odd, in a good way. The startling difference is how I'm more forgiving of the book's characters and the book itself - which to me, was really surprising. The thing is, I don't have a set perception of how an adult fiction novel would turn out. So that lends to my care-free attitude when I tackle books outside of what I normally like. I find no generalizations or any stereotyping in this genre; unlike in YA where a lot of books follow the same blue print. I'm still a big reader of YA; it's just sometimes, it's refreshing to read stories of characters right around my age.

This is told through both Anna's and Murdock's point of views; two lonely souls getting by through the dreary spring of East Coast Canada. There's something equally depressing in this season - even more depressing than Winter itself. It's the never ending battle between rising temperature (hope) and the frigid temperature that follows the thaw. It's mother nature's version of cock-tease, if you ask me. The weather added another layer of gloominess to the even more depressing cycles of thoughts between our characters but it wasn't to the point that you'll be entertaining suicidal thoughts.

Anna and Murdock are usually on their own; hence the persistent eulogies and soliloquies for things that are inconsequential. But see? This is how the author tells you how lonely they were. If you were alone, your mind would go to places that you'd normally tell it not to. You would obsess about what happened in the past and how you would change it, even if it were wasted energy spent on a futile exercise. And I normally loathe books heavy with narrative because it drove me nuts when characters describe every little thing about anything under the sun. It's too much information that I don't need. In this book, however, I learned to appreciate it. I was more forgiving. Anna, especially, was subduedly poetic of all the inanimate objects that she picked up on her walks. It's the artist in her that saw through life in every single useless items that washed up on the shores.

Murdock was pretty much the same; only it was much more painful to read him obsessed about how much he should've done for Rosaire while drinking his life away in the process. But even in his drunken stupor, you'll see hope beginning to bloom. I rooted for him, wanted him to get off his drunken ass and start polishing his wood (he's a woodworker. Get yer mind out of the gutters, sickos.). And you'll see it too. You'll see when he starts to get sick of his own thoughts, of himself and of his grief. You'll see his desire to just get over it already.

The author was deadly accurate with the ambiance he was shooting for. That part of Canada remains one of those untouched frontiers for me, regardless of the reality that it faces (diminishing population due unemployment, poverty - both because of a dying fishing industry). I also loved the old-world charm he presented; so archaic and charming and sublime. With his words everything just seemed magnified, brightened, more exposed. Or maybe it's just the way my imagination goes sometimes.

VERDICT: Anna from Away is a story of second chances and how a couple of people would strive not to squander that away. Set in the backdrop of the picturesque Cape Breton, the author took advantage of the scenery to proliferate the characters' need for self exploration. This book was artistically beautiful and garish that can only be appreciated by a forgiving, generous but critical few.

Marie says

a lyrical and haunting tale of love, loss, secrets and regrets in Cape Breton. MacDonald's prose catches the quirks of speech, the crack of ice, the inevitable entropy of all things new. A story of Anna who escapes her life into the lives of those with their own issues and memories.

Marcia Ceballos says

The writing style was somewhat confusing and the ending was flat. All through the book it seemed like the author was building to something, but never got there.

Michael says

This book satisfied my craving for tales that embed you in special places and communities, and Cape Breton in Nova Scotia is a wonderful environment for such a reading. It is not too different from the rural

community I moved to Maine, so it was of special interest to me.

The story is of a middle-aged artist, Anna Starling, moving to a remote island village in the middle of winter in response to the end of her marriage in northern California. Many lovely lyrical passages capture the healing power the harsh beauty of the environment has on her soul and its stimulation of her art. Some neighbors in the community of Scottish descendants appear to be the salt of the earth, such as Red Murdoch, a furniture maker grieving over the loss of his lover, and Breagh, a young single mother trying to making a business as a seamstress. Others are hopelessly damaged from their hardscrabble existence of subsistence living in a bad economy. The bonds of family get broken by youth moving away for work, alcoholism takes a toll, and the minor smuggling of the past generation has been replaced by more dangerous schemes involving drugs.

Near the beginning of the tale, darkness and death intrude on Anna's solitude in the form of seeing someone throwing a dog off the bridge to the island and a personal life-threatening experience with the dangers of winter. We root for Anna to find what she needs to take the next step in her life, but her stubbornness and unfortunate choices in romance get her in various forms of trouble. The characters come across as real and evolve with their challenges. Lines are drawn in the community over a particular conflict, which I unfortunately found a bit contrived. Despite this unappreciated turn toward the end of this book, the excellent prose and character development has me looking forward to exploring MacDonald's other two novels.

Phemie London says

It seems that everyone rated this book highly. It was well written with good descriptions of the scenery of Cape Breton (where I grew up) but I did not find that it was much of a story. I would recommend reading it (it is short) to judge for yourself since it generally got very good reviews.

Ellen says

I won this book as a Goodreads First Reads giveaway from Harper Collins and I am so grateful because I really enjoyed this wonderfully well-crafted novel! The author describes the rugged coastline of Cape Breton Island so beautifully - I could feel the wind whipping my hair, and the salt spray on my skin, as though I was there myself. I loved the storyline, the beautiful imagery, and the characters that kept me turning the pages all the way to the last page - I loved this book! I highly recommend it!
