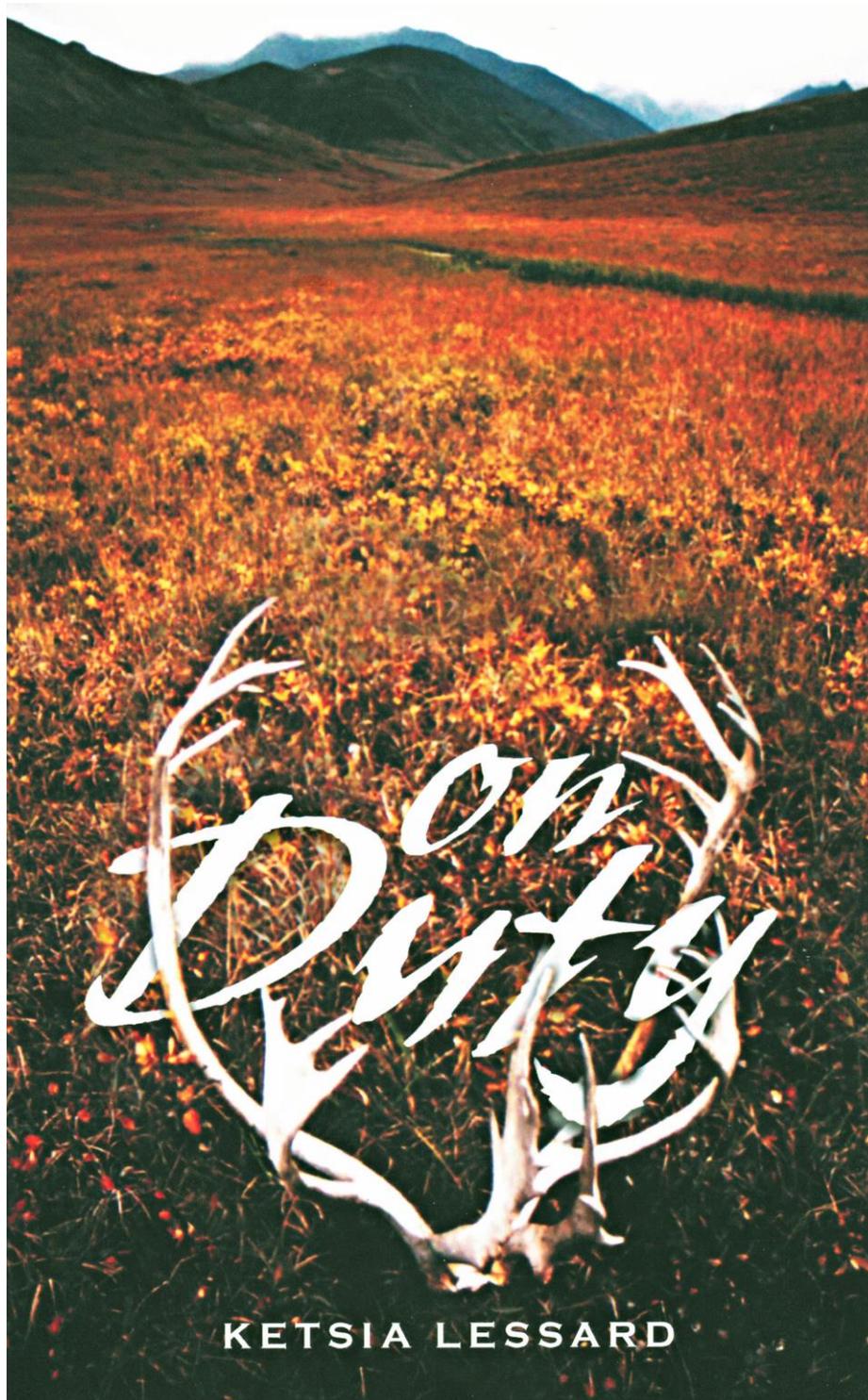


Author Bio

Ketsia Lessard was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec and graduated from the University of Quebec with a creative writing degree. Still living in Montreal today, she has travelled throughout Canada and done extensive research to help her understand the Canadian identity and the symbols that best define it.

Although French is her first language, Lessard deftly writes in English to bring her characters and the Northern setting she favours to life. She has long had an interest in Inuit culture and has spent years exploring their history and the RCMP's work in the Arctic. She credits her close bond with her older brother as another inspiration for *On Duty*, which is her first book. Ketsia Lessard is also a painter and a church musician.

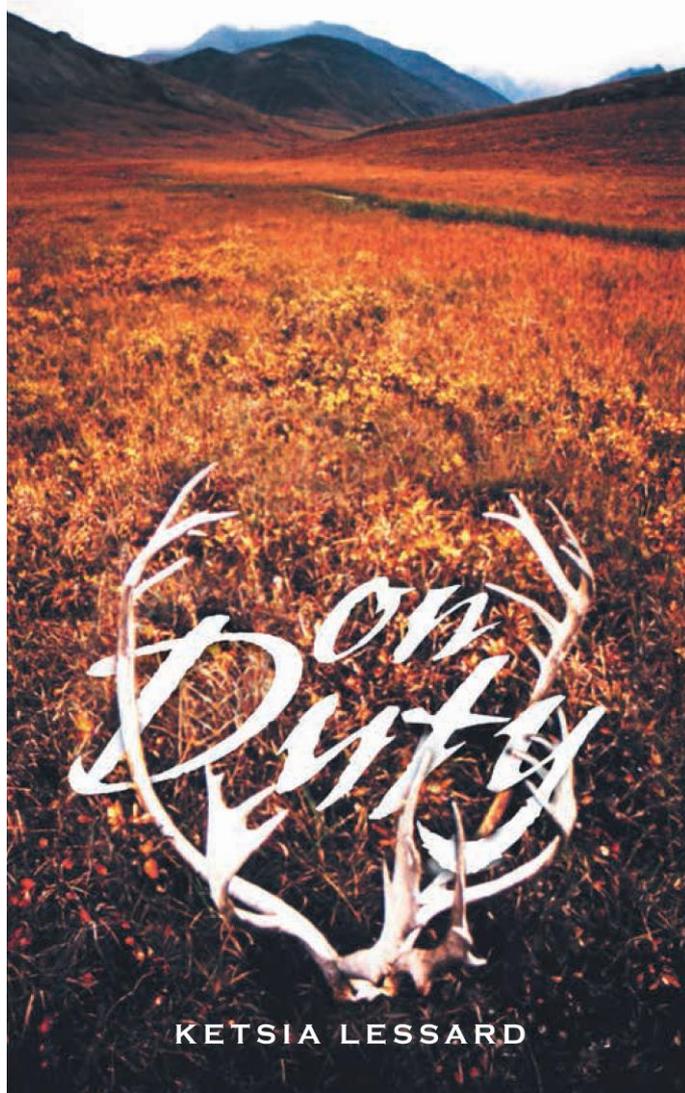




*Don
Duty*

KETSIA LESSARD

On Duty



When a deathbed confession leads RCMP Constable Jasper Nelson to discover the existence of his illegitimate sister, his curiosity is piqued and he sets out to find her. He locates the young woman a year later where he least expects to, within the police force itself. Raised by an Inuvialuit family and recruited as a community officer in the Northwest Territories, Nelson's sibling Heidi Finlay has experienced a life quite unlike his own.

As the geographical distance separating them becomes unbearable, Nelson obtains a transfer from Vancouver to the Inuvik detachment where he partners with the hardy Finlay to investigate criminal activity and trauma in the High Arctic. From bootlegging to child abuse, missing Aboriginal women to suicide epidemics, the two officers come to uncover corruption in the RCMP and examine their role as the "White Man" in a culture still reeling from the devastating impacts of the residential school system.

Inspired by actual events, *On Duty* is a series of cases narrated by the constables themselves; through Nelson's refined prose and Finlay's no-nonsense reporting, a portrait of human nature emerges, emphasizing the possibility—and need—for divine redemption.

For more information, please visit:
www.ketsialessard.ca

On Duty

Ketsia Lessard

ISBN

Paperback: 978-1-5255-4037-0
 Hardcover: 978-1-5255-4036-3
 eBook: 978-1-5255-4038-7

Suggested Price
 15\$

Publication Date
 February 2019

Genre

Fiction, Mystery & Detective
 FIC022000
 Fiction, Native American &
 Aboriginal
 FIC059000
 Fiction, Small Town & Rural
 FIC066000

Page Count
 174

Trim Size
 5" by 8"

Publisher
 FriesenPress

Wholesale
 INGRAM Catalogue

Individual Order
www.friesenpress.com/bookstore

PRESS RELEASE

TRUST AND RECONCILIATION Residential Schools' Damaging Legacy Inspires Mystery Novel

[MONTREAL, QUEBEC] According to the Government of Canada, suicide rates among Inuit youth are some of the highest in the world, at eleven times the national average. Nunavut's crime rate is also alarmingly high, at seven times that of southern Canada. As first responders, RCMP officers stationed in the Arctic often feel overwhelmed, balancing a challenging workload with the need to make sense of the violence, the despair and the residential schools' dark legacy. Are government strategies the only solution to help a broken people heal? Author and visual artist Ketsia Lessard's meticulous research led her to explore this very question in her debut novel, *On Duty*.

On Duty is a multi-layered detective story about Constable Heidi Finlay, a jaded Mountie who learns to trust when she discovers her long-lost half-brother Jasper Nelson is also a member of the force and partners with him to investigate criminal activity in the High Arctic. Raised by an Inuvialuit family affected by the residential school scandal, Finlay struggles with her faith and resents the Church for its involvement in her friends' pain. Her pilgrimage leads her to discern a spiritual war that seems to influence the Mounties' success in keeping the peace in Inuvik, Northwest Territories and Nauyasat, Nunavut. From bootlegging to child abuse, missing Aboriginal women to suicide epidemics, the siblings come to uncover corruption in the RCMP and to examine their role as the "White Man" in a culture still reeling from the devastating impacts of the residential school system.

"Lessard is clearly knowledgeable about the cultures that she presents...and her book does a good job of showing the complicated and problematic relationship between Indigenous communities and the officials who often victimize them...A law enforcement novel with engaging characters" -*Kirkus Reviews*

Ketsia Lessard's *On Duty*, produced by FriesenPress, is available for order from major online book retailers, including Amazon, Chapters/Indigo and Barnes & Noble. The eBook is available for Amazon Kindle, Apple Books, Kobo, Nook, and GooglePlay.

About the Author

Ketsia Lessard was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec and graduated from the University of Quebec with a creative writing degree. Although French is her first language, Lessard uses English here to bring her characters and the Northern setting she favours to life. She has long had an interest in Inuit culture and has spent years delving into their history and the RCMP's work in the Arctic. Ketsia Lessard is also a painter and a church musician.

Contact

Ketsia Lessard
514 384-7732
ketsialessard@tutamail.com
www.ketsialessard.ca
###

Siblings fight crime in Inuvik mystery novel

'Lots of beauty, not just pain' in storytelling, author Ketsia Lessard says

by Nick Pearce

Northern News Services

RCMP Const. Jasper Nelson's father makes an admission on his deathbed: his son has an illegitimate sister.

It's one of the opening moments of Ketsia Lessard's novel *On Duty*, which was released this spring. Following that scene, the woman is revealed as Heidi Finlay, an RCMP officer raised by an Inuvialuit family in Inuvik.

After the lost siblings meet, Nelson is transferred to Inuvik and the two begin fighting crime and connecting after years of separation.

What follows is a largely episodic novel, where the characters live the legacy of residential schools and their own roles as RCMP officers in the community.

Their relationship is the heart of the novel and tends to ground it when it veers into more uneven sections, the most unexpected of which is a hastily introduced Free Mason plot in its final chapter. For the majority of the novel, however, Inuvik appears as the third main character, lending place and context to the siblings' story.

Speaking to *Inuvik Drum*, author Ketsia Lessard said she was drawn to the setting when painting a picture set in town. Over the course of her research, she read local records and media coverage and the memoirs of a northern RCMP officer to learn more about Inuvik and wove it into her storytelling.

"When I discovered the town in

the context of the painting and the characters, I decided to set it there. I was just drawn to the place I guess," said Lessard, adding her roots in northern Quebec helped her connect to the setting.

She also chose Inuvik to explore the legacy of residential schools in the area. While the complexity and weight of the subject could be difficult to broach, she said she found "lots of beauty, not just pain" in her research on the local history of the subject.

Her readings fascinated her. The research pushed back on the south's stereotypical image of the North, she said.

"It wasn't just winter 12 months out of the year. The polar nights, the polar days. Mosquito season. It was such an interesting place to describe in the book. I really wanted people to love being in that place, not just find it a depressing subject."

'They can have pride'

She said she hopes the novel lends "a certain pride" to residents who read it.

"I hope they can have pride and be happy about it, feel like they are heard and loved and understood," Lessard said.

Parallel to this attention to local detail is the two main characters' process of considering their positions as RCMP officers in the community. Lessard, who's based out of Montreal, said it wasn't her job to tell Northerners' story for them.

As a result, the characters aren't



photo courtesy of Ketsia Lessard

Novelist Ketsia Lessard says she hopes the novel is an uplifting story for readers.

"heroes or saviours," she said. "They're eye-witnesses and narrators of what's happening."

Their relationship underlays this process, with the novel switching between Jasper's more florid prose and Heidi's more measured reporting.

Both sides hint and their growing ties and was based-off Lessard's own experience with her older

brother, who moved out when she was young.

"I always missed him very much," she said. "Stories about siblings always moved me very much and I didn't have to make that up in the sense that it was already inside of me. These were feelings I already had and I could draw from that."

Building off that spirit of redemption, she said she hopes the

novel, while dealing with heavy themes, is an alternative to downbeat Canadian literature.

Addressing larger subjects is important, she said, but it's also vital to feel hopeful.

Ultimately, that's what she hopes the residents of Inuvik take away from her book.

"I wanted them to feel uplifted," she said.

Sample Questions

Q: What inspired you to write this story?

A: My father introduced me to the Canadian television series *Due South* when I was eleven. A few years after his passing, nostalgia brought me back to it. The idea for this book came from one of the episodes in which the lead character, a RCMP Constable from the North, finds out he has a half-sister working for the police force. There was a lot of potential in that storyline but it was never developed. I am a visual artist, and the desire to create an illustration of the two characters led me to do some research on their work and background. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada had just been published at the time; as I read the document, the connection between the RCMP's challenging work in the Arctic and the residential school legacy became clear to me. The idea for *On Duty* was born out of all this. The weather and geographical realities of the North also fascinate me, so I arranged the story so that each investigation takes place during a specific season. Each case is also representative of a particular social issue in the Arctic.

Q: Did any of your inspiration for this book originate in your real-life experiences?

A: My mother was born and raised on Quebec's Lower North Shore which has a fishing, hunting and berry-picking culture that is not too different from Inuvik's. Yearly trips to that region as a child helped me to understand the environment I describe in my book. It also allowed me to discover the local Innu culture.

Another important element is my brother Eric who is 17 years older than me. He moved out when I was seven and got married soon after. He later moved to Alberta. I have been missing him since, and this has helped me appreciate the value of the sibling bond.

Q: Why did you write this book in English, French being your first language?

A: I am bilingual. The lead characters, who are also the story's narrators, are English Canadians. It was a logical choice for me to write the story in their mother tongue.

Q: Why did you write a story about Inuit and English Canadians living in the territories being a French Canadian from Quebec yourself?

A: I've always had a hard time nailing my cultural identity down growing up in Quebec's separatist context. I am not a separatist, and Montreal is a multiethnic city; being a white girl sometimes meant finding myself in the minority in school, church and in the workplace. My family is Protestant, which is rare in Quebec, and very misunderstood. As an artist, I never felt like I could participate in the local culture, and I had to find other ways to contribute. I soon realized I had more in common with the rest of Canada, and began exploring that culture and its symbols. The language barrier was not difficult to cross since my father was bilingual and I began reading English books at an early age.

I have been amazed by the Inuit ever since I can remember. I admire their ingenuity and the resourcefulness that helped them survive under such harsh conditions. Their fusion with the land gives them a very good understanding of what this country is all about. As a Christian, I was very saddened to read about the Church's involvement in the residential school scandal that has hurt them so. I needed to write about it.

Q: Are there any specific authors whose writing styles or subject matter inspired your book?

A: Yes, I feel indebted to Charles Portis' *True Grit* for helping me establish the narrative style, especially for Finlay's voice. I would say Lucy Maud Montgomery taught me the art of description and *Emily of New Moon* is a novel I love to read again and again. Farley Mowat is a great storyteller who's written a lot about the North. C. S. Lewis handles symbolism like no other.

I must also mention Lakota author Richard Twiss, Paul Palango, retired RCMP inspector Ian T. Parsons and Inuvik's first mayor Dick Hill for the abundant factual information I found in their books.