



Holding

Graham Norton

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Graham Norton's masterful debut is an intelligently crafted story of love, secrets and loss.

The remote Irish village of Duneen has known little drama; and yet its inhabitants are troubled. Sergeant PJ Collins hasn't always been this overweight; mother of two Brid Riordan hasn't always been an alcoholic; and elegant Evelyn Ross hasn't always felt that her life was a total waste.

So when human remains are discovered on an old farm, suspected to be that of Tommy Burke - a former love of both Brid and Evelyn - the village's dark past begins to unravel. As the frustrated PJ struggles to solve a genuine case for the first time in his life, he unearths a community's worth of anger and resentments, secrets and regret.

Darkly comic, touching and at times profoundly sad. Graham Norton employs his acerbic wit to breathe life into a host of loveable characters, and explore - with searing honesty - the complexities and contradictions that make us human.

Holding Details

Date : Published October 6th 2016 by Hodder & Stoughton

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Author : Graham Norton

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Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Cultural, Ireland

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Emer says

In an awards ceremony last year this was voted as Irish book of the year. I'm at a loss as to how. I guess it was more to do with the celebrity status of the author Graham Norton as he is a well known tv and radio presenter and sometimes comedian rather than the quality of the book. Okay. That's probably harsh. The characters were nicely written but the plot was dull at best and the atmosphere that one should feel when reading a whodunit / unraveling of secrets type novel was tepid at best. And perhaps my own preconceived ideas of what this book would be coloured my judgment too. I envisioned a book with more heart. A little more humour. This was simply much too beige for me.

two stars

Paromjit says

This novel written by Graham Norton has charm and is set in the remote Irish village of Duneen, of little note until builders unearth human bones on a farm. This has the local grapevine over excited and clamouring for information, whilst peddling gossip galore. This discovery has far reaching repercussions for the residents. It is assumed that the bones are those of Tommy Burke, who apparently left the village some years ago, amidst a scandal involving two women, the now alcoholic Brid Riordan, whom he was going to marry, and Evelyn Ross, who desperately loved him.

Sargeant PJ Collins, the village guard, is rather fat and is ridiculed. He has used his fatness to hide emotionally from the world and life itself by avoiding emotional entanglements. His experience of real crime and murder is virtually non existent so he is understandably flummoxed when faced with murder. Detective Superintendent Linus Dunne arrives from Cork to oversee the investigation and a resentful PJ is expected to play a minor role. However, PJ is reluctant to accept this and sets out to delve deeper. As he does so, deeply buried secrets from the past come to surface. PJ for the first time in his life, finds himself experiencing what it is like to be desired by two women. He is a man awakening to life both professionally and personally. As he gets ever closer to the truth, he finds himself in mortal danger.

There is pain, loss, and sorrow expressed powerfully in the novel. We encounter the harsh judgementalism that epitomises attitudes of the past in society that have resulted in emotionally broken souls. The character development of PJ Collins was excellent. The more I read of the book the more involved I got in the story. An excellent book of which the author can be proud. Highly recommended. Thanks to Hodder and Stoughton for an ARC.

Susan Johnson says

3.5 stars

This was a pleasant, cozy mystery set in Ireland. The characters were likable, the interactions between people were realistic and the mystery had a nice twist. It was a great way to spend a cold, winter's day.

Petra says

I've liked Graham Norton, who is a well-known TV and radio presenter in the UK, for years. So when I discovered he had written a novel, I was really curious to read it. I received an ARC via NetGalley (thank you!) but then I got hold of the audiobook, which is actually narrated by Graham himself, so that made the whole thing even more intriguing.

Set in a small village in Ireland (Norton was born in Ireland), *Holding* is a cozy mystery featuring Sergeant PJ Collins whose job as the local Garda has been pretty unexciting for the past twenty or thirty odd years. All that changes when builders developing farmland discover human remains. Could this find be related to the disappearance of a local man who, decades ago, had left behind two brokenhearted women?

At times, the mystery aspect became secondary as Norton revealed the painful pasts of the characters. It became a touching and on occasion rather sad novel about unfulfilled lives, about dealing with grief, loss and the constrictions of living in a small Irish community where gossip and judgment are omnipresent. At other times, Norton's wit shined through and made me smile. The writing flowed well and the characters and the setting really came to life. This was enhanced even more by the author's narration.

I admit I had wondered beforehand whether Graham Norton's narration would be overly theatrical, but it was actually very understated. He achieved a lot just through emphasis, pacing and subtle changes in voice.

Overall, a lovely piece of writing, a gentle mystery but with a compassionate and moving story and a well-narrated, enjoyable audiobook.

Aisling Zena says

4 stars

I have to be honest, I requested this book because I saw it was written by the delightful Graham Norton and I had no idea he was an author. I went in to this hopeful but not entirely sure of what I was getting. Thankfully any worries I had were completely erased in the first few pages.

Graham Norton writes in the third person with his narration jumping beautifully, maybe effortlessly is a better word, from person to person. He weaved a lovely tale that I devoured in one sitting. His descriptions, for me, were beautiful and it made me feel like I was holding his arm and walking around this small Irish village, eating popcorn and getting all the juicy news.

"People didn't stop in Duneen. In defence of the casual traveller, there was little reason why they should. There was nothing to make the village stand out from any other. Wedged into a gentle green valley, jagged terraces of two- and three-storey buildings lined the road, painted long ago in the sort of paste colours usually associated with baby clothes. At the bottom of Main Street there was an old bridge across the River Torne. Beyond that, the solid grey chapel kept watch on a small hill. No one living could recall a time when it had ever looked any different. Time didn't pass in Dundeen; it seeped away."

The plot revolves around an overweight guard, Sergeant PJ Collins, an alcoholic mother of two, Brid Riordan and the lovely Evelyn Ross who feels her life has passed her by with nothing to show for. The days in Duneen are mostly the same, rolling by with nary a whisper of change until some human remains are found in an old farm. Huge excitement stirs the sleepy village with speculations and theories abounding from everyone.

I felt like I was part of the village and getting the inside scoop and piecing together a giant puzzle. And even though I could guess some of it with every new piece I was given, I was having so much fun turning every page, discovering every piece, to mind. It also had a few surprises that I wasn't quite expecting and immensely enjoyed. My favourite moments where when Graham Nortons acerbic humor would shine through.

"Linus? What sort of a name was that? How could he solve a crime if he couldn't even figure out that his name made him sound like a gobshite?"

If you love a good whodunit that takes you in picturesque villages in Ireland as a backdrop, do give this one a try.

***ARC courtesy of publisher via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.*

P.S. Forgot to mention after I posted this, to any friends not from the UK, Graham Norton is a much loved TV presenter with his own show. The Graham Norton Show. If you have never watched it I urge you to look it up. Seriously entertaining and very funny especially if the combination of celebrity guests is just right.

Jules says

What an intriguing and emotional delight this book was!

I love Graham Norton, so I have to be honest, I was a little nervous about reading his book, in case I didn't enjoy it and felt disappointed, but it was exactly the things I love in a book. It's the kind of murder mystery story that doesn't get bogged down in police procedural, which is the part of crime fiction that generally sends me to sleep.

Holding focusses on a variety of interesting characters within a close-knit community in Ireland. Although the characters are very different from each other, they share a similar sadness and loneliness that makes it impossible not to connect with them on an emotional level. In some places it was a little darker than I had expected it to be, and at other times somewhat heart breaking.

"I went to bed with Graham Norton last night, and he kept me awake until at least 1am" is something I never thought I'd type on Facebook in my lifetime. Life is full of surprises.

This is a great novel, full of fascinating characters that had me so captivated by their secrets, I found it almost impossible to put down each night.

Cheri says

3.75 Stars

Set in the small Irish village of Duneen, the kind of place where everybody knows everybody else, and if someone comes to town or someone leaves town, before sunset the whole town knows. Sergeant P.J. Collins is the village garda, an unmarried man with an uneventful life, an uneventful job, that is until the day the builders managed to unearth bones. Human bones. Most people tend to view P.J. Collins as a likeable fellow, if incapable of performing his duties should he ever be physically required to move swiftly, not that they were unkind to him.

Locals begin to gossip, conjecture on whose bones these might be, with the only person to have disappeared from their town was that Tommy Burke, leaving two young women broken hearted, Brid Riordan, his betrothed, and Evelyn Ross, who had felt he belonged to her. It is up to P.J. to investigate, something he has never had to do, never done. Detective Superintendent Linus Dunne is sent from Cork to oversee the investigation, a situation that P.J. Collins feels is wrong, it's his first real chance and he has to take advantage of that.

Everything in Duneen changes when the body is discovered, and then a second body of an infant. P.J. finds more than he bargained for when he begins to question some of the locals about the disappearance of Tommy Burke. Nerves start to fray, people share rumours and "alternative facts."

When P.J. begins to talk to the two women, Brid Riordan and Evelyn Ross, things get even more interesting as P.J. becomes the object of some affection. One woman is more than he's ever had to concern himself with, but two?

There is more to this mystery, and more to this story than just the mystery. There's the pain and heartbreak of the past held onto through the years, the sorrow of so much loss in such a small village, the loss of so many dreams, plans, hopes for the future as individuals and as a town, and the secrets kept for too long by too many. There's also newly gained self-assurance that comes from finally being seen and appreciated – a powerful thing for someone who has believed he had little to offer. There are even a few amusing moments.

This is a delightful debut novel with some wonderful characters, but Sergeant P.J. Collins is the main character, and certainly a charming one.

Pub Date: 01 Aug 2017

Many thanks for the ARC provided by Atria Books

Gary says

When I heard Graham Norton had written his debut novel I was intrigued to see just how good it was. I have read his biography but obviously this is a lot different and a different skill all together. I was very quickly

impressed with just how well written this was, it flowed well, it was well paced, the characters were well developed and more importantly it was interesting.

The novel takes place in the remote Irish village of Duneen which has known very little drama. Human remains are discovered on an old farm, suspected to be Tommy Burke the former love of Brid and Evelyn who was thought to have left the village many years ago. Overweight Sergeant PJ Collins who hasn't seen any action like this previously tries to uncover the truth with great difficulty and succeeds in uncovering dark secrets and a troubled past.

In my opinion the novel is less about whodunit but more about the characters and the emotions that run through the novel. I genuinely liked it and read it very quickly wanting to read it whenever possible.

I would like to thank Net Galley and Hodder & Stoughton for supplying me with an advanced copy of Graham Norton's debut novel in exchange for a honest review.

Astrid Langeveld says

Het verhaal gaat over een Iers dorpje waar een skelet wordt opgegraven op een bouwterrein. De plaatselijke politie stelt met hulp van de recherche een onderzoek in, waarbij duistere geheimen van enkele dorpingen aan het licht komen.

Ik was in het begin heel sceptisch. Weer een bekend iemand die denkt dat hij kan schrijven. Soms pakt het goed uit en soms niet. Deze keer wel. Ik zat vanaf het begin in het verhaal. Je kwam stukje bij beetje meer te weten wat er gebeurd was. Er zaten een paar plotwendingen in. Steeds dacht ik ja ik denk dat ik wel weet hoe het zit en dan las ik verder en had ik het toch mis. Ik vond het een aardig debuut. Ik ben benieuwd of Graham Norton nog meer gaat schrijven.

Wilma says

Prachtig verhaal met onverwachte wendingen...ik hou van verhalen die zich in Ierland afspelen!!

Het verhaal is mooi, tragisch, met een humoristische twist en hartverwarmend...een verhaal zo beeldend verteld...klaar om verfilmd te worden!

Maureen says

Comedian and TV presenter Graham Norton, is a well known and very popular personality here in the UK, however, that doesn't necessarily make for a good novelist. I was surprised then to discover that in fact he's produced a really good debut novel, written with flair and searing honesty.

Duneen is a small, sleepy, Irish village, where life has meandered along in much the same way it has for generations. It has its own police officer in the form of Sergeant P J Collins or PJ as he's known to many. PJ is 53 years of age and he feels as if his life hasn't really gone anywhere. He's never had a proper relationship, indeed he believes he's the laughing stock of the village due to his obesity. He knows that women don't find him attractive, and that the community snigger behind his back as he wedges himself behind the wheel of his patrol car. His career never really happened either, there's not much call for policing in Duneen. However, when a construction company begins excavations up at the old Burke family farm, they unearth human remains, and suddenly PJ finds himself in the spotlight - begins to feel rather important. That doesn't last too

long though as the investigation is taken over by Detective Superintendent Linus Dunne, sent down from Cork Headquarters, with PJ as his gofer. It's not merely human remains that come to light though, but some long held secrets surrounding Duneen's residents.

This is a wonderful story about love, loss, dark secrets, alcoholism, troubled relationships - in other words it's about life! Graham Norton writes in such an easy going style that flows without effort, and you know something? I'm really going to miss Duneen and its characters. A really impressive read.

*Thank you to Netgalley , Hodder & Stoughton & Graham Norton for my ARC in exchange for a fair and honest review *

Carol says

3.5 Stars. Excellent Bookclub Read!

Sergeant P. J. Collins is quite **A** character and is **THE** main character in **HOLDING**. For the first time ever....in the remote Irish village that he calls home....he has a mystery to solve....he is the law.

A bumbling Guard at best with not much to keep himself busy besides an occasional drunk, PJ finds himself in a bit of a quandary when human bones are unearthed at a building site....he knows not what to do!

Often ridiculed for his weight and well aware of his undesirable physique....a sweaty, out of breath PJ shuffles around asking questions, does a bit of research and soon finds he is enjoying this quest for truth.

Nothing heavy here, just a light, enjoyable read with a couple good reveals.

Thank you NetGalley and Atria Books for the ARC in exchange for an unbiased review.

Dem says

<3.5 Stars

Holding by Graham Norton is an easy and pleasurable read, better than I was expecting but not not going to make my year's favourite list

Holding is Norton's debut novel and is set in a small town of Dunedin in County Cork where life goes by and little happens out of the ordinary until a building site unearths human remains and the life's of the inhabitants of Dunedin become filled with suspicions and wonder and the secrets that were buried with the bodies slowly begin to reveal.

The book had several characters and each is affected in the discovery of the remains and we are introduced to them slowly, I liked the characterisation and the plot as both are well imagined and interesting. The book is well paced and while I had thought the novel was going to be funny and typical of Norton quick wit the book is quite serious in places and not what I had expected.

I did however have issues with the sense of time and places in the novel and felt that the modern part of the novel didn't in fact reflect a modern Ireland and this bugged me a little while reading the novel but it didn't take away from the overall enjoyment of the book.

I was a little afraid that I would not be able to separate the author from the television personality and that his TV persona would be all over this novel but have to admit that he wrote a novel that was so different from what I had perceived.

An easy and pleasurable read and I look forward to more books from this author.

Dannii Elle says

I received this in exchange for an honest review from NetGalley. Thank you to the author, Graham Norton, and the publisher, Hodder & Stoughton, for this opportunity.

First of all, yes, the author is *that* Graham Norton. I am not normally one to be interested in celebrity-penned novels as, dare I say it, they often aren't that good... This, however, proved to be a hilarious and thrilling exception!

Set in the remote Irish village of Duneen and featuring a plethora of stereotyped characters, I wasn't initially sure how much I would come to enjoy this. My initial reservations proved to be my eventual partialities, however. This had such a twee feel to it and the characters felt already known. It had a reliable feel, akin to that of an Agatha Christie novel: it was safe and yet exciting.

The mystery detailed is a curious one, the writing was completely alluring and I was pleased to see that Norton brought much of his beloved wit to the novel. This could have quite easily become a brooding and atmospheric tale, but instead there was hilarity brought to alleviate the darkness.

I immediately felt like one of the locals as Norton maneuvered the reader throughout the village, from perspective to perspective, picking up local gossip along the journey. It is through this organic gain of information that the village and the characters came to life and where clues were dropped, culminating in the eventual solving of the complex mystery that plagued this rural village.

This is a brilliant crime fiction read featuring provincial living at its finest! I hope this is the first installment in a series as I am eager for Sergeant PJ Collins to become the next Poirot!

Diane S ? says

3.75 PJ Collins is the only law, the local garda, in the small Irish village Duneen. He is by all accounts a very overweight man who loves his food, which his housekeeper Mrs. Meany so thoughtfully supplies. His job entails little, there being virtually no crime to speak of, as the villagers just get on with the tasks of their daily lives. A quiet town, until bones are discovered in a field and thought to be that of a young man, who had once farmed this land, and was said to have run away to the city. Now PJ must use his abilities in solving this crime, which becomes especially pressing when bones of a baby are also found.

Although there is a mystery at hand, this novel, written in a tongue and cheek manner is really about the

people in the village, the secrets they hold, and the loss of dreams they once had. Also about a young garda gaining confidence in himself and rising above the situation in which he is presented.

I have heard of this author, his show but have never seen it, though a friend of mine at work says she finds him amusing. This is his first novel and I enjoyed reading this rather quiet story, looking into people's lives and behind the facades they present daily. Maybe an Irish cozy as there are really few, well actually only one, heart pounding moment. A nice diversional read, especially for those who are more attracted to character driven stories as opposed to edge of your seat suspense.

ARC from publisher.

Publishes August 1st in the US by Atria.
