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Following tragic events, from which Julie ODale believes she and her husband, Ian, will never recover, Julie buys into Ians dream to give up their comfortable city lives and retreat to the Chilcotin area of British Columbia. Along with a team of draft horses, four cow ponies, and the range cattle, which are included in the purchase of the remote six-hundred-acre ranch, they reluctantly inherit the reclusive tenant who lives in an old trappers cabin on the property. As both Julie and Ian wrestle with their deteriorating marriage, and the individual guilt and sorrow that drove them to try to run away from reality, they have to contend with the wilderness at their doorstep and the mysterious tenant, Virgil Blue. Against his will and theirs, he slowly becomes drawn into their lives and has an impact in ways that none of them could have foreseen.

Somewhere In-Between Details

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From Reader Review Somewhere In-Between for online ebook

Julia says

I was not surprised to have loved this book. Donna Milner has become one of my favourite authors. She writes of family drama. This one takes place in the Chilcotin region of British Columbia. Ian and Julie, a married couple have just lost their daughter, their only child in an auto accident. Their grief and pain doesn't allow them to speak her name between them. They purchase a ranch in a very rural setting, away from town and away from people that would remind them of their daughter.

It is heart wrenching to see their marriage deteriorate under the burden of grief, sorrow and guilt. They can't seem to hang on to each other and draw strength from their marriage and their experience of being Darla's parents.

It is a touching and emotional story of how they eventually found the path to healing. The ranch country is described so beautifully and breathtaking, I want to live there myself! (minus the threat of bears!)

Gerry says

Interesting story about lives upended by personal tragedy & how we find our way back to fuller life. In the background, the lush & dangerous Chilcotin landscape offers the opportunity to grow or die.

Gayle says

I bought this book based on the high ratings, but have to say the book was somewhat of a letdown. What frustrated me was the first half of the book dwelling on the grieving mother, Julie. By the middle of the book, I was so sick of Julie's nonstop brooding, self-pity, and self obsession with her grief. I appreciate the grief this mother would have gone through but felt the author went on ad nauseum about it. What carries the book is the ranch's tenant, Virgil Blue, a fascinating character - an old school loner cowboy of few words who keeps to himself but has a powerful influence on the other characters, including Julie. The book picks up in the middle as the author starts to integrate Virgil's story and focuses on other characters who are trying to move forward with healing. As much as the book was a disappointment, the ending is moving and Virgil's destiny brought me to tears.

Janine says

This was interesting but occasionally got bogged down with too much descriptive text.

Jackie says

You really cannot say much about this book because the pleasure is experiencing the tension, the heartbreak and putting the pieces together as you read! All I can say is: Get it! Read it!

Joanne says

What an exquisite book this is. The story of a couple (Julie and Ian) torn apart by the tragic sudden death of their only child, it combines a beautiful natural portrait of Chilcotin ranch country, a certain mysticism about the afterlife, and piercingly poignant insights into the pain that humans carry around in them.

The descriptions of the physical beauty of Chilcotin country are so exact, so gorgeous that I wanted to drive up there tomorrow. You can smell the fresh air, hear the wind in the trees, see the sparkling lake waters.

At the same time, you can feel the pain of loss eroding Julie and Ian from the inside out. Their lives have turned to dust from blaming each other and from their inability to connect. When they sell their city home and move to an isolated ranch, they "inherit" a First Nations ranch hand who is himself well acquainted with pain and loss, and who has a direct connection to the person both Ian and Julie blame for their daughter's death. It is this man who brings everyone back from the brink, and makes us realize that life does/must go on, like it or not.

What a truly beautiful book. If I could give it more than 5 stars, I would.

Julie Brown says

Devastatingly sad, but hopeful. A story of love and loss, letting go and finding your way back again.

Victoria says

Canadian author Donna Milner novel "Somewhere In-Between" is a story following the tragic events, from which Julie O'Dale believes she and her husband Ian, will never recover. Julie buys into Ian's dream to give up their comfortable city lives and move to the Chilcotin area of British Columbia. Both Julie and Ian struggle with their deteriorating marriage and the individual guilt and sorrow to try to run away from the reality they have come to contend in the wilderness at their home and with their tenant, Virgil Blue. Against his will and theirs, he slowly becomes drawn into their lives and has an impact in ways that none of them could have foreseen. AGAIN, another wonderful read by this great Canadian author and I'm looking forward to her next (4th) novel she is currently working on.

Debbie Gatacre says

A book written by an author from the Chilcotin in BC. This is my second book by her. This one is about

grief and what it does to hold on to blame. Her daughter who was killed tries to reach her Mom from the “in between world” she is in so her Mom can let her go and move on with her life :

Corry says

Move over Jodi Picoult, I think Donna Milner surpasses you with this family-drama story. I loved the voice of the daughter who's in the "in-between" phase and sees how mom and dad struggle with the loss of their only daughter and come to terms in the end. Excellent book

Sarah Boon says

I won this book from a Caitlin Press giveaway, and was pretty happy about it because I love reading books set in Canada. This one is set in the Cariboo country of northern BC, and it evokes that landscape and culture really well (having lived there for several years I had firsthand knowledge of the area).

The story itself is a bit light and fluffy. Easy reading for a summer afternoon at the lake or a rainy day inside. The characters were generally believable, and their personal struggles are engaging. There's even some inclusion of First Nations culture, which is a key sector of the Cariboo demographic.

I recommend it for a light, enjoyable read with (spoiler alert!) a happy ending. :)

Xian Xian says

Here is a novel that I received for review by Caitlin Press. This review will also be on the blog tour for this novel, so welcome aboard! I will put the synopsis here, then I will talk about it because this is what this is for:

Following tragic events, from which Julie ODale believes she and her husband, Ian, will never recover, Julie buys into Ians dream to give up their comfortable city lives and retreat to the Chilcotin area of British Columbia. Along with a team of draft horses, four cow ponies, and the range cattle, which are included in the purchase of the remote six-hundred-acre ranch, they reluctantly inherit the reclusive tenant who lives in an old trappers cabin on the property. As both Julie and Ian wrestle with their deteriorating marriage, and the individual guilt and sorrow that drove them to try to run away from reality, they have to contend with the wilderness at their doorstep and the mysterious tenant, Virgil Blue. Against his will and theirs, he slowly becomes drawn into their lives and has an impact in ways that none of them could have foreseen

I don't always read novels like this, when I do it is very rare. Lately all I have read was surrealism and satire. This novel kind of falls in between paranormal/ supernatural and contemporary. It's a very sweet and touching novel. Nature is a big thing, a theme. There is a whole feast of description of the beautiful land that the three main characters Julie, Ian, and Virgil Blue inhabit. The book cover is also beautiful, and I'm assuming that it is portraying the land in the book.

The novel is very character driven, the whole plot centers around Julie moving on and her daughter, Darla,

encouraging her to move. Virgil Blue is the mysterious dude who silently leads her to the path of forgiveness, who has had a tragic past.

Somewhere In-Between is the novel of forgiveness, it doesn't matter if you're dead or alive, it doesn't matter what color your skin is, it doesn't matter whether or not it was his fault or not. It's a novel where you just have to accept the reality, let the truth come to you, death isn't something that a person can escape or forget. You can't let it suck you away. That's what happens for most of the book to Julie. She develops such a depression to the point where she shuts everyone away from her and her husband, Ian, does exactly the same. Levi Johnny, the friend of Darla, who was present during the death of Darla, gets blamed by her mother, even though it was the mistake of a young teen doing dumb things. She even starts to develop a slight prejudice to people who even look slightly like Levi Johnny. She throws all of her anger at Levi and refuses to listen to Levi Johnny, who knows exactly what happened. It only takes her daughter from purgatory to come to her and tell her the truth. Julie is a frustrating character, because she is angry and stubborn and never listens to anyone to the point where you start to think that Julie is really is so distraught that she will never be able to heal or maybe she is just self centered. Her husband deals with it worse, by burying himself in work and ignoring everything. Their way of coping is real and human, they are flawed and undeniably human. Darla and Levi Johnny are your typical teenagers, in love with life and foolish, until the accident breaks everything apart.

Donna Milner does a great job with bringing this whole novel to life, the nature, the people, it's like watching those movies on TV that make you feel sad and then the ending is happy and you feel so touched. You feel like eating a tub of ice cream, then you cry into to it, then the happy ending happens and you feel all warm inside, like you got hugged. I love books like that.

Di says

This is a story about a couple struggling with grief. The setting is a ranch in the Chilcotin area of BC. Very descriptive. I felt empathy towards the couple and was glad that there was a glimmer of light at the end.

Story Circle Book Reviews says

A conversation at Tim Horton's (a coffee shop) begins the story of a couple looking to buy a ranch in the Chilcotin region of British Columbia. Then the landscape takes over and the first chapter becomes a beautiful description of the expanse of land. It helps to ground readers in place and introduces one of the forms of silence explored in Somewhere In-Between. This particular silence is an appreciation of the surroundings: the old-growth forest, the willow-lined creek and "a haze of coastal mountains."

There's some mystery about the couple, Julie and Ian O'Dale. A tragedy has led to Julie leaving her career as a real estate agent and it seems they have lost a daughter. The silence that engulfs them is grief unexpressed. They are in a state, hanging on by a thread, between existing and living fully, between being parents and not having a living child.

The author, Donna Milner, is courageous in allowing this silence rather than filling it with activity. And one could say the couple is courageous in being with what is. The land, and the couple's silence, hold much more than first seen. One night the sky appears "like an electrical charged curtain" with the aurora borealis, the

northern lights.

As the story unfolds, readers are introduced to the O'Dales' daughter, Darla, who communicates from her state of "in-between." These sections are reminiscent of Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones* in which the young victim speaks from beyond the grave.

While Darla sounds like a sassy teenager and refers to herself as a "dead white girl," she realizes she can't move on until everyone she loves lets her go.

As for the term "dead white girl," it could become one of those weighty book club questions. Darla recounts a story, "The Legend of Crow," that her boyfriend Levi Johnny told. There's a reverence for the story as she recalls the carved pendant of a crow Levi wore and later gave to her. And then she thinks he "takes this spirit guide thing way too seriously now." She mixes honour and a love for her boyfriend with a dismissing of his traditions.

This could be the author's way of describing similar attitudes among non-Native people.

Darla's mother Julie, quite early on, addresses bigotry on the part of her family, remembering racist comments from her father. She is challenged by the fact that Levi, Darla's Native boyfriend, was the driver of the car in which she was killed. He and his family are also in a state of in-between, suffering from the emotional aftermath of the accident.

While Darla shares the past story, Julie is living in the unfolding present. She walks the land in silence and sits in silence with the tenant who lives in a cabin on the ranch: Virgil Blue. She learns of spirit animals and symbols.

Virgil is without a voice due to throat cancer and sometimes uses an electrolarynx or write notes. His very rich and poignant story is told by the narrator. I appreciated passages in which the details were meticulous and meditative.

The novel raised many questions which will stay with me long after closing the book. For instance, what can we "settlers" learn from people of the First Nations on whose traditional land we now reside? Is there any way we can help to change attitudes even if we can't change history? And what of our own heritage brought to Canada by our ancestors from elsewhere?

I imagine Julie and her family dealing with the same questions while reconnecting to one another. Julie remembers Darla singing "Galway Bay" and "Danny Boy" when she was just eight years old.

by Mary Ann Moore
for Story Circle Book Reviews
reviewing books by, for, and about women
