



Gold Digger

Vicki Delany

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It's the spring of 1898, and Dawson, Yukon Territory, is the most exciting town in North America. The great Klondike Gold Rush is in full swing and Fiona MacGillivray has crawled over the Chilkoot Pass determined to make her fortune as the owner of the Savoy dance hall. Provided, that is, that her twelve-year-old son, growing up much too fast for her liking; the former Glasgow street fighter who's now her business partner; a stern, handsome NWMP constable; an aging, love-struck ex-boxing champion; a wild assortment of headstrong dancers, croupiers, gamblers, madams without hearts of gold, bar hangers-on, cheechakos, and sourdoughs; and Fiona's own nimble-fingered past don't get to her first. And then there's the dead body on centre stage.

Gold Digger Details

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From Reader Review Gold Digger for online ebook

Linda Suzane says

Enjoy history? Like a mystery? Gold Digger is an absolutely delightful historical mystery. I thoroughly enjoyed spending time back in 1898, the Yukon Territory, in the rip roaring mining town of Dawson. A native born Californian, I was raised on stories of the 1849 Gold Rush and the founding of San Francisco, so reading about the last great Gold Rush had a lot of familiarity but the great Canada wilderness was an unique setting. Vicki Delany has made the town of Dawson and its inhabitants come alive with a vivid realism of a great historical, without making one feel like they are reading a travelogue or passages quoted from a dry history tome.

The story's heroine, Fiona MacGillivray, is a woman of great courage and strength of will in a time when most women were thought of as no more than chattel. She owns a saloon, the Savoy, named after the fashionable London hotel. She is a woman of class and breeding, in a place where even a saloon owner can be considered respectable, if she acts as such. She has a 12 year old son Agnus, a smart inquisitive lad who hero worships the local Mountie, Constable Sterling, and wants to become a Mountie himself.

After surviving the arduous journey to get to the Klondike and the near starvation of the first winter, summer is extraordinary beautiful, with fields of glorious wild flowers, warm days, sapphire blue sky. Life is good in Dawson, the Savoy's business is booming, until Jack Ireland arrives. A newspaper reporter from San Francisco, he immediately makes enemies and within 3 days is found dead, throat cut, on the stage of the Savoy. Was it the rival newspaper man? Or Fiona's lead singer, Irene, whom Jack physically abused? Or Fiona's partner, jealously protective of Irene? Or the good woman that Jack called a prostitute in his first story sent back to San Francisco? Or Fiona herself, whom Jack threatened to destroy for standing up for Irene and defending herself? Or someone else?

Not a particularly complex mystery, it is still satisfying all the way around. It works because of the well drawn characters and setting handled with a careful attention to detail.

In my opinion, Gold Digger really strikes gold!

I understand it is the start of a new series, and I look forward to once again visiting Dawson and its interesting and colorful inhabitants.

Patty says

Enjoyable mystery, interesting history lesson and basically a fun read. Fiona is a single mother in the Yukon of 1898. A 12-year old boy, owning a saloon/dance hall, and trying to maintain a "proper" status in the rough and tumble world of the the Klondike gold rush is enough to keep her busy without a murdered man being found on her stage. The dead man has only been in town two/three days and already made a number of enemies and no one who met him seems to have liked him. Possible suspects are Fiona's business partner, her best dancer, and a good friend. Is one of them the killer, or someone else?

I liked this book and will read more of this author.

Jessica Simon says

The Yukon's past still provides good stories.

In *Gold Digger*, readers from Outside will find author Vicki Delany has recreated the Yukon mythos admirably, even dredging up details of little known habits of our working girls. Overall *Gold Digger* is an intriguing frolic through the romantic past of a remote land. With damsels in distress, rugged miners, ruthless killers and dauntless Mounties, *Gold Digger* has all the flavour and frivolity of a play the heroine, Fiona MacGillivray, would have produced on her own Savoy stage. In fact, *Gold Digger* is well-suited for adaptation by the real Gaslight Follies troupe that performs nightly throughout the summer in Dawson.

Sourdoughs will recognize Fiona's newcomer attitudes and knowledge of the North when she mistakes singing voles for rats (a species that does not exist in the Yukon) and believes her son when he says he's going frog hunting (permafrost being inhospitable to reptiles). They'll appreciate that while Fiona denigrates her customer base as unkempt and uncouth, the filthiest miners were the most successful; they got that dirty by moving muck to get to the gold at bedrock. And they'll understand that while Fiona questioned the miners' intelligence, a fair number had formal schooling and those who didn't made up for it with ingenuity. Locals will understand that Fiona's behaviour is in keeping with that of her contemporaries when she turns a blind eye to the local First Nations, even though they supplied the meat and food that kept the stampedeers alive during the starvation winter of '97-'98.

Delany has left plenty of space for Fiona's growth as a Yukoner and I look forward to watching the character's understanding deepen as she moves into the ranks of Pioneer. I pray Fiona stays in Dawson rather than hightailing it to Nome in 1899 with the rest of the stampedeers. I foresee her exposure of the triumvirate of powerful men who maintained Paradise Alley (as hinted at in Lael Morgan's book *Good Time Girls*), and anticipate a feminist uprising when Dawson's society ladies campaign to clean up the capital by moving Paradise Alley to Lousetown, after they forceably relocate the First Nations.

With the *Gold Digger* series, Delany has created a prime opportunity to upgrade the quality of Klondike fiction, and I applaud her effort to gradually develop a comprehensive portrayal of the gold rush era.

Donna says

Really enjoyed this book but it did take me longer than usual to get into the story. This may be because I had just read several books in Delany's 'Constable Molly Smith' series before beginning 'Gold Digger' and so I had to adjust to changes in writing style, main character, and setting.

Stories about the Klondike gold rush have always appealed to me but the sense of the struggles and hardships experienced by people traveling to the gold fields became real to me during trips to Alaska - visiting Skagway, seeing parts of the trail of '98', experiencing the terrain and elevation changes from the coast of Alaska to the summit to reach the border of the Yukon Territories, and the knowledge that this climb was

repeated multiple times since each person was required to have a ton of supplies before the Mounties would allow them to enter Canada.

In 'Gold Digger', the author makes reference to the struggles people endured to reach the Yukon but the bulk of the story is set in Dawson City. Delany does an excellent job of describing the hastily-thrown-together, rough but relatively peaceful, muddy/dusty community that existed for the sole purpose of provisioning and entertaining the miners. Throw an occasional murder into this mix of rough and tumble characters and the story becomes even more entertaining.

Fiona MacGillivray is a wonderful heroine, although I will admit that I didn't really care for her at the beginning of the book. Strong, independent, resourceful, intelligent, and a tiny bit antisocial, Fiona has only one weakness - her son. Regardless of what life throws at her, she always lands on her feet. In the early chapters, all these qualities made Fiona appear somewhat cold and harsh, but as the story evolves, and we learn more about her background, Fiona becomes a more likeable and possibly even more loveable character. I was a big fan of her son, Angus, right from the start. Early in the book, we are introduced to many characters but they become distinguishable fairly quickly.

Unlike other mysteries that I've read, discovering the identity of the killer is only a small portion of the plot in this book. The bulk of the plot deals with Fiona's dealings with her son, her staff, and the assorted inhabitants of Dawson.

I liked the writing but found the changes in perspective, third-person to first-person narration, a little abrupt at times - enough to throw me out of the book on occasion. Overall though, I found this a very entertaining and enjoyable story. Immediately after finishing this book I started 'Gold Fever' - also a good read. To really appreciate Fiona, I'd suggest reading this series in order.

Laurel says

This is the first book in a series, that introduces us to saloon/dancehall proprietress and single mother, Fiona MacGillivray. What is unusual about Fiona is that she is raising her twelve year old son Angus alone, in wild and wooly Dawson City, in the waning days of the famous Klondike territory gold rush, circa 1898.

I enjoyed this book immensely, especially the detailed descriptions of what life was like for the inhabitants of the town-it's miners, prostitutes, storekeepers, dancehall girls, and sundry others who braved the wilds and the difficulties of reaching Dawson, to strike it rich with a gold claim, or to make a fortune catering to the needs of miners with dollars to spend, and nowhere else to go.

The murdered corpse of an American journalist is found on Fiona's dancehall stage. There are suspects aplenty, to be sussed out by various members of the Northwest Mounties Police-the forerunners of Canada's famous red-coated RCMPs, or as they are lovingly called by Canadians, the Mounties. At first, I found Fiona's character abrasive and hard to like. However, as the story progressed, she grew on me. She has her son's best interests at heart, and does not suffer fools gladly, nor does she allow herself to be pushed around by anyone-a positive character trait in a time and place where men ruled the roost, in business, in the home or in the saloon.

Vicki Delaney has done her homework, in portraying life at various socio-economic levels, in rough and tumble Dawson. I want to see where she takes Fiona, Angus and the other inhabitants of Dawson, as the turn

of the century approaches. I read this book as part of my challenge to read books set in all of Canada's provinces and territories. I am looking forward to more adventures and to learning more about my country's history, prior to the incredible changes that swept across Canada when WWI called Canada's young men to defend England and The Commonwealth, against the Kaiser's armies. Many will argue that Canada truly became a nation within the next twenty-five years, despite the fact that Confederation took place in July of 1867.

Mary Anne says

Good entertaining plot, and great descriptions of life in the Yukon at the end of the gold rush. Too bad the main character was not very likeable: arrogant, self-absorbed, and most unlikely to have survived in the harsh culture of the time.

Susan says

In the spring of 1898, even though it is ten years past the height of the Yukon gold rush, Fiona MacGillivray and her partner are striking it rich running a dance hall in Dawson. When a dead body is found on the stage almost everyone is a suspect because the victim, a reporter from San Francisco, was such a nasty piece of work. Fiona, who is willing to leave the investigation to Mountie Constable Sterling and is not particularly bothered by the idea of the murderer getting away nevertheless gets tangled up in the plot. The story is competently written but I could not warm to either the heroine or the setting..

Susan says

Meh. I wanted to like this book more than I did. It is a first book of a new series, and these often have some bugs to work out so I am more lenient with my ratings and reviews. But, in this case three stars gives a lot of leeway.

I tended to dislike the protagonist, Fiona MacGillivray. Often, I asked myself 'would this characteristic bother me if the protagonist were male?'. On a couple of occasions, I sheepishly admitted 'no'. But overall, the answer was 'yes', the same characteristics would bother me if the character were male. Fiona is callous and self-serving, which bothers me no matter the gender of the character. Also, while she pretends to be and regularly claims to be super intelligent, she makes some fairly stupid decisions. Plus, she also pretends and claims to be people-savvy - and she is when she is manipulating people, but overall she really has little/no emotional intelligence and so also little/no social intelligence. I got the sense that Delany was aiming for 'hard past led to hard shell with soft heart' in Fiona, but I did not buy it. The only redemption was that Fiona seems to love her son, though even then in a somewhat selfish way. On the other hand, I did like many of the other characters, including Fiona's son.

After that, the plot plods along through the Yukon mud, which the reader is told about frequently. Actually, the reader is frequently told about a lot of things. Yes, this book seems well researched, but it is also

repetitive. I often checked that my e-book reader had not jumped backward as similar incidents were reported repeatedly through the book, often with nearly the same turn of phrase each time (and really, how many times does someone need to get thrown out of a bar before the reader understands that yes, they were are literally thrown out of the bar?).

Overall, and OK read. Not terrific. Not terrible. But OK. I will likely read the next of the series to see where it goes and who the characters develop. I also have a book from one of Delany's other series on my TBR list, which I am still planning to read. I am at least intrigued enough to see where things go.

Bobbie says

Klondike Mystery #1. Fiona, a woman of questionable background, runs a saloon/dance hall/gambling parlor in very rugged Klondike in the 1800s. A hated newspaper reporter is murdered inside her establishment. Slow at first. Took over 1/3 of book before it got into the beginning of the solving of the murder. Descriptions of people and environment interesting but hard to take. Much written about drunks vomiting and urinating and the mistreatment of horses and dogs. Fiona was not terribly likeable. But story was extremely suspenseful towards the end. Not sure I'll read the other books in this series but I remain of fan of this author.
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Lisa C. says

Decent story. I found myself laughing out loud more than once at Fiona's thoughts and actions. The author did a good job of showing how (supposedly) sane men would throw everything away to work themselves to death and have nothing to show for it.

There was too much reference to her past with no explanation. It kind of bogged down a couple of times with the lengthy descriptions of the gold process but it was interesting how people lived during the gold rush.

Fiona was funny, strong and stood her ground but I didn't necessarily care for her Queen complex. Her son was adorable and, again, the author did a good job of showing life from his point of view, the son of a single mom living in the middle of nowhere.

Cathy Austin says

Enjoyed this to the point of not being able to put it down. So, a good read!

Vicki Delaney is a well known author in Canada and I have no clue why I have not read her before now. Must stop shelving books on my actual bookcases and read the darn things when they're purchased. So glad I read this excellent tale set in Gold Rush era Yukon, mud-filled Dawson, 1898. Fiona MacGillvray is the formidable saloon co-owner and most savvy gal of the world. Instantly likeable, she is a take no prisoners type of person and this has sustained her through numerous past experiences which are revealed throughout the book. Her son, Angus, 12, is a chip off the old block, inquisitive and devoted to her and his dream, to become a Mountie!

The Gold Rush years were hard, very hard and the men lived hard, worked hard and enjoyed themselves wholeheartedly after weeks digging in the gold fields, the Savoy was there bliss, Fiona and her business partner, Ray Walker's saloon/dancehall. All sorts of folk end up in Dawson, shacks are built daily, and rebuilt if there's a fire; all sorts sail into town or come over the Pass. One such fellow is hated on sight by many: Mr. Ireland, a newspaperman, a womanizer, a dandy more like a wolf in sheep's clothing. Trouble happens wherever he is, on the planks, at the Savoy, everywhere in town.

When he ends up dead on the empty Savoy stage, several people are immediate suspects.

The town Mountie, Richard Sterling, is on the case (and kinda has a crush on Fiona) along with two other men from the Fort. Maybe the fave dance hall girl, Irene did it or Ray or even Sam, the bartender, or even Graham Donohue, town reporter who's been acting right aggressive whenever Ireland's around?

The aha moment comes at just the right time and the chase is on.

Delany infuses this historical/fictional/mystery with just the right amount of wit, humour, accuracy and a fantastic cast of Yukon-ites to keep us turning pages to the finale. The setting makes you crave a taste of the far north.

Description is perfect, "Ray himself looked like he'd been dragged out of a snowdrift and left to thaw in front of a one-twigg fire" and "The scar running the base of my throat down to the swell of my breasts, I still carry today. I am told that men find it fascinating."

This is a great period read and Fiona is a superwoman ahead of her time. Saucy, clever, beguiling, delightful.

Susan says

This book had promise. The promotional blurb promised a murder mystery set in a interesting location with lots of interesting characters. I was expecting suspense and drama.

What I got instead was a disjointed story that jumped back and forth between first person and third person (a completely unnecessary first person, I should add; at no point did it give the reader extra insight into her character) and had zero suspense. In fairness, there might have been suspense had I not constantly been pulled out of the story by yet another narrative switch.

Because I was reading this for two reading challenges, I powered through anyway, but I was turning pages for the sake of getting to the end of the book and moving on to something more enjoyable.

Elizabeth says

I might have enjoyed the story more if I didn't get so affected by the ambience which was knee deep in swampy mud, swarming with vicious biting bugs, and peopled for the most part by putrid smelling stumbling, vomiting drunks. I shuddered through out. I'm sure they all had hearts of gold.

C. says

Knowing my first journey with **Vicki Delany** would be the Klondike, I learned about it. The thinking, people, and wilderness are laid out so well; anyone would acclimatize. Her grasp of Canada in 1898 is colourful and astute. When we reach suspense and danger, they are well-plotted. Her characterization is excellent. *Angus, Constable Richard Sterling, Mrs. Mann, and Helen* are especially likeable. *Fiona*

MacGillivray, I admire as a firm, intelligent businesswoman but prefer as *Angus*' adoring Mother.

What I noticed is, this didn't feel like a mystery until page 114. Announcing a crime doesn't make it one and if there's a genre that needs to be strict about keeping the focus and pace on it, it is this one. Nearly the whole felt like a tableau of general fiction, albeit with superb wit. Even when we reached the murder that we backtracked over those pages; the focus was on making money, as police presumably performed in the background. The death affected no protagonist, presented no danger. *Fiona*'s role as a sleuth did not begin until the tail end. It was one encounter that suddenly became adventurous. As exciting as these parts were when they gelled together and generated belated suspense, they were too little too late.

Description was too detailed; especially when everyone's smell, dirty or mended appearance, repeated on the same personages. Highlighting emotions is what keeps us in a character's head, which was done very well with *Angus*. The recognizable setting and saloon are exceedingly creative but should have played a distant fiddle to an atmosphere of mystery, nor do we need to know every citizen so well right away. Anyone is likely to find their footing after volume #1. The pace might well surge ahead in the succeeding novels. I am invested and keen to read them.

Philip says

I liked reading this book and it should rate more than 3 stars, probably not 5 but likely 4, but it has a flaw that i dislike immensely in a murder mystery novel and because of this I must deduct at least a star. First I must say I really liked the settings, the historical info, most of the characters one is supposed to like, especially Angus even though he may be a bit mature in some ways for his supposed years and I just as much disliked the characters one is supposed to dislike. Fiona, as other reviewers have pointed out, has to kind of grow on you as the story moves along and it will be interesting to see how she develops in later books in the series. Now to the flaw - I maintain that in a murder mystery all loose ends must be tied up in the ending and, most importantly, the culprit must be brought to justice in some way. This doesn't happen in this book and, at least this time, the vaulted "Mounties" did NOT get their man (or woman). The only way this is acceptable is if the books are not really a series but a serial with each book being a chapter leading into the next book similar to some of Michael Connelly's Harry Bosch series like "The Poet" and "The Narrows" or Louise Penny's Armand Gamache series with "The Brutal Telling" leading into one of the plots in "Bury Your Dead". Somehow, from reading the synopsis of later books, I don't think that is the case here! However at least the book had a definitive ending and didn't just stop in the middle of the story like both of the first two books in Roy Innes's Inspector Coswell series do. For that I suggested giving his second one "The West End Murders" a MINUS 5 star rating!

I will read at least the next one in this Klondike series and see how it ends!
