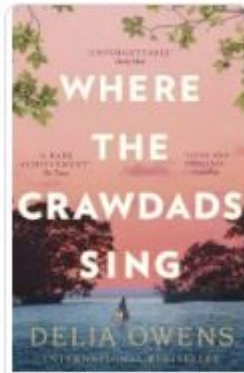


‘WHERE THE CRAWDADS SING’ by Delia Owens

William

I found this book to be a most with crafted eloquence but reflecting personal and status quo by directly

The heroine (Kya) and her community. Kya, also referred abandoned by her family as a abject poverty. However, she surrounding marshland that stimulates her soul.



compelling read and written not only accompanied by many contentious issues political associations that challenged the encountering enduring societal prejudice.

family are ostracised by the local with the sobriquet ‘Marsh Girl’, is young child and is reduced to living in establishes an immutable bond with the provides her with edible sustenance and

To Kya the marsh is not as dystopian as it would be to others. She tended to live in discreet obscurity. Survival is said to be the first ingredient of success. Is Kya happy, when happiness is so nebulous and evanescent? I think the jury is still out as the story doesn’t enlighten the reader.

Kya becomes the apotheosis of feminine pulchritude as she becomes a beautiful adolescent teenager, manifesting all the associated angst she faces the eye of the hurricane without maternal support and guidance. The attraction of human association remains transient especially when attempting to form alliances with male contemporaries, created and exaggerated by her physical and societal isolation. The appeal of her beauty and her ‘coming of age’ explorations adds a nuance to the encounters. However, the overriding impression is one of amazing personal fortitude and perseverance.

Then came the death of Chase and the investigation by the police with Kya becoming a suspect and then accused of his murder.

I did not correctly identify the killer of the hedonistic Chase. I expected the perpetrator to be either ‘Jumpin’ who had befriended and supported Kya and provided a receptive ear for her problems, or her first boyfriend Tate after he had returned to the area and was attempting to revive his relationship with Kya. The evidence of the presence of ‘red wool’ suggested Tate. It couldn’t possibly be our heroine.....but what do I know?

However, the process of her prosecution was an inexhaustible urge to adopt the unorthodox, perhaps the weakest element in the story - which is a pity.

By encapsulating elements from Kya’s distressing life - is this book to be classified as a tragedy - reflecting her complex expectations and desires - which ultimately lead to her rejection. We witness her innocence and her loss of innocence. Her estrangement from society. Having been subjected to her father’s brutal behaviour and her lack of formal education however, does not prevent her from enjoying later literary success. Each facet of her story is detailed and well-informed.

Think the unthinkable. How well would we have coped growing up in Kya’s situation?

I have taken two extracts from the book that I particularly enjoyed:

'Closing his eyes, Chase played 'Shenandoah' his palm fluttering on the instrument like a bird trapped against glass' and

'But Kya walked on. She had given love a chance, now she wanted simply to fill the empty spaces. Ease the loneliness while walling off her heart.'

The last comment being the most apposite to reflect my impression of the book.

'The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members' (Mahatma Gandhi).

A most enjoyable read - with thanks to Alix for her recommendation.

Stephanie

I loved this book. It follows the life of a young girl, Kya. Growing up in marshlands in North Carolina. The marsh people are looked down on by local townfolk who regard them as second class citizens and Kya's life is further compromised by very challenging family circumstances. Her father is an abusive alcoholic who successively drives all the rest of the family, with the exception of Kya, away. Eventually the father also disappears leaving Kya, then aged 6, totally alone. The story is a hugely touching tale about how Kya manages to survive in spite of being shunned and mocked by town people and deserted by her own family. Initially her only support comes from a couple, Jumpin and Mabel, who own a local store in coloured town on the marsh. Her feelings of loneliness and lack of friends is described with immense sensitivity as is her love of nature and these are two enduring themes throughout the book. Her loneliness however makes her vulnerable in spite of her innate lack of trust in other people. She makes two friends besides her friendship with Jumpin and Mabel; one is very kind and sensitive lad, Tate, who gradually befriends her and gains her trust through a mutual love of nature and teaches her to read. The other is a privileged young man from the town, Chase, who takes dreadful advantage of Kya's loneliness and totally abuses her promising that he will marry her. Tate then goes off to college leaving Kya feeling yet again abandoned and Chase become engaged to a 'nice' young lady from the town without telling Kya. The writing is beautiful and the reader is led to deep sympathy with, and admiration, for Kya. Chase is found dead and the judgemental town folk immediately suspect that Chase might have been killed by Kya - because she is a 'marsh person', an outsider. The book ends with the investigation into Chase's death and the final answer. An exceptional wonderful and sensitive book examining loneliness, friendship, exploitation, intolerance and bigotry.

Sharon

I enjoyed the setting of the book – I knew very little about the North Carolina swamps and marshes and the details of the wildlife were interesting. Small town life and its day to day routines and prejudices were very well described. What stretched my belief was that Kya's mother would have left her behind at all (and her brother) although later it was said that she was psychologically disturbed due to the abuse she had suffered and did want her children back once she had settled. The other difficult thing to believe was that nobody in the town took enough interest in Kya (apart from Jumpin and his wife) to help her. Surely somebody would have taken her in, even though they looked down on her as "the Marsh Girl" or she would have ended up in the care system in the real world.

Notwithstanding all that, I found the book very entertaining and wanted to get back to it and find out what happened. I was very happy that she ended up with Tate and lived a happy life with him.

I didn't anticipate the twist at the end and it was quite satisfying to find out that she had actually done away with the bully/rapist.

I would recommend the book, not only as a good story but also as an insight into a very different world.

Margaret

It took me a while to get into it but once I did I became totally hooked.

Kya had been left on her own from the age of 6 years, abandoned first by her mother followed by her older siblings and finally by her father. She coped on her own from that early age managing to feed herself having learnt much from her mother and her brother Jodie.

The people she was closest to were Jumpin and his wife Mabel, a coloured couple where she used to go for her supplies, and they befriended Kya and were good to her.

Then she had put her trust in Tate who she had known since childhood and to whom she owed so much especially as he had taught her to read and write. Eventually this enabled her to become a renowned writer about nature and the marshes that she had already learnt so much about. (Maybe just a bit far fetched!) The detailed descriptions of this and also about the stars and planets that Kya had read about from Albert Einstein's book were beautifully done.

Then, even Tate abandoned her when he realised that he had to make a life for himself where she could not possibly fit in.

There was also Chase Andrews to whom she became attached and she believed him when he promised marriage, only for him to go off and marry someone else.

The start of the book focussed on the murder of Chase Andrews and Kya became a prime suspect which wasn't surprising because of everyone's prejudice against her and her being known as the Marsh girl. Chase had tried to rape Kya after he was married and no wonder Kya could never trust him again or indeed anyone else.

Her brother Jodie tracked her down, due to her publications and from him she learned of her mother's death although nothing was known about the other siblings or the father.

The court case about the murder was cleverly written and gripping; neither the case for the prosecution nor for the defence were clear cut although it was felt that most were prejudiced against Kya and therefore she would be found guilty.

I became quite emotional towards the end when Kya died in her sixties presumably having spent the last half of her life feeling safe and content after all she had been through from early childhood.

The ending was something of a shock. Why did she kill Chase? This was probably because she was afraid that he would come after her and she hadn't ever been used to being protected, she had always had to look after herself. I felt pleased that she had got away with the murder; Tate had truly loved her and her secret would go with him to his grave, After her death he had found a poem that she had written and hidden, confessing to her guilt, with the missing shell necklace that she had made for Chase and which he always wore.

Jean

From the first page, this novel captivated me. Delia Owen's book has every ingredient. It's poetic, detailed, and is filled with tension. I was immediately drawn into the marshland of North Carolina, by the first beautiful sentences;

'The morning burned so August-hot, the marsh's moist breath hung the oaks and pines with fog. The palmetto patches stood unusually quiet except for the low, slow flap of the heron's wings lifting from the lagoon.'

It's not surprising that it has topped the New York Times Fiction Best Sellers' of 2019 and 2020, for 32 non-consecutive weeks and, in January 2021, 124 weeks on the Best Sellers' list.

The storyline spans 1952 -1970, following Kya Clark between the ages of six and twenty-five, as she grows up alone in a shack in the marshland of North Carolina, after being abandoned by her

family, her abusive father being the last to leave.

She learns from the wildlife around her, camouflaging herself to evade truant officers and acquiring hunting skills to feed herself, catching mussels and fish to sell to shopkeepers in the town beyond the creek. Kya experiences extreme loneliness, and turns to the gulls in times of sorrow, for example, when Tate leaves her.

She uses her knowledge of Nature to understand relationships.

Owen's cleverly brings crime fiction into her novel and the book incorporates an investigation into the death of Chase, the arrogant posh boy, when bigoted witnesses incriminate the 'swamp girl'.

Kya is provided with tutors to overcome the fictional limitations of a feral recluse with no vocabulary. The ending of the novel is a shock to the reader.

When Tate discovers that Kya has murdered Chase and is the poet, Amanda Hamilton, he destroys all the evidence, burning the poems, including 'The Firefly', and returns the shell to the seashore.

I suppose I felt slightly duped by Kya, but could understand her actions, and I also felt that Tate didn't blame her. At last, Kya finds peace and happiness with Tate.

Throughout this novel, suspense, tension and beauty are cleverly intertwined to create a memorable work of fiction.

Doreen

There is a saying, 'Fact is stranger than fiction', and, indeed, this has proved true on many occasions. So it is possible that a child could survive living alone in the marshes and swamps of Carolina. Kyla, however, was very unprepared for such an experience. She did not know how to cook or grow food. She had very little money to buy supplies and there was no Ray Mears to give her a course in survival techniques. Her shack did provide shelter and she knew about one danger-tetanus. Apart from a rusty nail, she didn't encounter any life threatening dangers. I know if I had met any form of reptilian life, I would have immediately died of a heart attack! Surely snakes and other dangerous creatures frequent swamps and marshlands? Kyla watched and learnt about the regional 'nice' flora and fauna like the friendly birds, shells, flowers and insects that didn't bite or sting. The biggest threat to Kyla came in human form in the rejection and ridicule of the town folk and the abandonment of almost all those she felt close to. She mercifully escaped her father's bullying and for one short interlude experienced a brief window of companionship and instruction. Her initial attempts to welcome her father play home with clean sheets and a prepared meal was heartbreaking. He was such a monstrous bully and it was hard to read Kyla's recollections of a terrifying episode one Easter.

Perhaps Kyla's childhood memories of living with a vicious, predatory male and the effect his behaviour had on those who were close to him eventually saved her from becoming a similar victim. Her mother and siblings had no other choice but to leave in order to escape the nightmare of constantly living on a knife's edge. Over time, Kyla came to realise why her mother failed to return but she also knew that, unlike her family, she could never abandon her roots. She is anchored to the marshlands and swamps forever and will do anything to protect her life there. Even if that results in murder.

I enjoyed reading this book and found the ending cleverly believable in that it brought the story full circle. I would be happy to read the book again at a later date.

Gill

This book had really good reviews and I thought I'd enjoy it. The description of the marsh environment was beautifully written and I felt as though I could transplant myself there with ease. I also found it slow, a bit like 'slow TV' reindeer migration which was fine.

However, I found it very sad, despite some uplifting aspects – Tate teaching Kya to read was one of these, Jumpin's friendship another, and Kya's eventual literary success.

I thought it unlikely that a child would be this abandoned, but perhaps 1960s poverty and discrimination can account for this.

I wondered why the poetry was included as it didn't seem to fit and, compared to the prose, was not very good. It became clear at the end that this was how Kya would admit to the murder, presumably knowing that Tate would find it. Maybe the author thought of this ending first and then felt that Kya/Amanda's poetry had to be included earlier. This part of the plot didn't work for me at all. I learnt quite a bit about marsh life (including crawdads as crayfish) and overall the setting itself and descriptions makes this a very good read.

Chris

I loved the writing and the wonderful descriptions of the landscape in this book, and the story of Kya, a girl abandoned at a very young age by her mother and one by one by her entire family, left without food or money, friends or relatives, in a shack in an American swamp. The girl's love of all of nature, the sky, the sea, the insects and birds, and every marsh plant, sustains and supports her through a very lonely life. The town people look down on her and treat her badly; they call her the Marsh Girl, a dirty creature to keep away from, and she decides to keep away from them too, and manages to grow up with only a very few ounces of human kindness. Jumpin and Mabel, the storekeepers, show her love and generosity, and look out for her as best they can.

Two boys come into her life; the first Tate is kind to Kya, teaches her to read and shares her love of the marsh, nature and poetry. Her first real friend, but again he abandons her and she becomes bitter and more lonely. The second is not kind, Chase. Rich, selfish and manipulative, he abandons her too after talking marriage whilst arranging a wedding to another. He is found dead one day and Kya is suspected.

Kya is now an intelligent and independent woman who has become a respected published naturalist by the time she is brought to court for the murder, but is still the Marsh Girl in everyone's eyes. She is still alone and distances herself from other people. Surprisingly, she is however supported to eventual acquittal and she and Tate finally come together and live in the marsh. After Kya's early sudden but peaceful death, Tate's discovery that Kya was actually guilty of the murder ends a sad story, an enjoyable read and I would recommend it.

Angela

From the very start of this book, I was hooked by the beautifully observed prose and sympathetic handling of the emotion and turmoil of Kya's life. Although it stretched the imagination to believe that this girl could survive her circumstances, somehow Owens made the jump. I felt as if I lived beside Kya and the wonders of the marsh, swamps and sea. Feeding the gulls, exploring the backwaters, as well as living the harshness and traumas of her day to day life. I am not a great fan either of stories of coming of age or love triangles, but somehow the beauty of Owens writing got past all that. I just loved the pictures of nature that she conjured up: the wild and the child of the marsh. I also thought that Owens managed to make the story a real adventure mystery which I enjoyed guessing at. All in all an enthralling read.

Ann

I became engrossed in this very poignant story. I was sitting on the edge of my seat most of the time, hoping my heroine would make the right decisions and stay safe, as she became alone and lonely as a young girl after her family abandoned her one after another. It is remarkable the way she resolutely overcame such difficulties as having no money, no education and no company or support, except latterly from a few loyal friends. Her bewilderment as to why her family had all left, especially her beloved mother, haunted her. I was enchanted by her involvement with the wild beauty of nature in which she became an integral part and which enabled her to survive and pass onto others, her depth of knowledge of the local wild life.

The story told is convincing about her natural desire for company and love and the two men in her life who could destroy or save her. The murder mystery incorporated into the survival of this young girl, was beautifully described and the evidence carefully set out. I never guessed the ending. It was

a lovely book.

Thoughts on reading the book:

In these days of Covid lockdown, where isolation has been a problem, especially for those living alone, you can well see how isolation can affect people, but even more so in Kya's case. Her love of nature and her ability to relate to it and even use it was her path to sanity, as has been the case for lonely covid threatened people, who found release in their gardens and wild life.

The prejudices of the surrounding community enforced Kya's isolation. People's ignorance and fear of someone, unlike themselves, her colour, her culture, where she lived, her lack of sanitation, her lack of education and friends, all lead to her more complete isolation. I don't think colour is necessarily the bar to integration; I think culture, language and taste are all contributing factors. People's fear of being dragged below their 'standard of living' etc, of lowering themselves to what they consider are lesser, different values I was always struck by a quote when I read "Gone With the Wind" where Scarlet O'Hara refers to "white trash". Presumably coloured people have their standards too?!

When I was very little, we lived in Brixton, where my elder brother attended a state junior school. He would come home with bloody knees, because he was teased by ignorant children. We moved soon after to leafy Surrey and he was awarded a scholarship to the Grammar School, and although always "bookish" never suffered such cruelty again. Like animals who kill the weak and odd, humans often act in this animal manner.

I thought this was a beautifully crafted book with loving references to wild life and a wonderfully interesting story going through it. Very moving. I didn't guess the ending.

Anna

I was looking forward to reading this book- lots of plaudits from heavyweight newspapers, etc., but I found it a rather mixed experience. In fact, I nearly gave up once or twice, but I don't like doing that, so soldiered on.

The author's great strengths, I thought, were her knowledge of the North Carolina coast and its wildlife, and her feat of imagination in creating her main character, Kya. She really seems to have thought herself into the plight of this abandoned child as she grows into a young woman, feeling rejected by other people. She rejects others in her turn, feeling that to let down her guard will result in being hurt all over again. From what she observes in the creatures around her she takes only lessons of the same abandonment and selfishness she has experienced in human beings. In search of love, she opens up first to Tate and then to Chase, both of whom let her down in different ways. The owner of the place where Kya buys her fuel for her boat, Jumpin', and his wife show her great kindness and understanding, but it does not seem to be enough to make a hole in her resentful armour.

I thought the weaknesses were a tendency to bathos in some of the descriptions of life outside the marsh - we do not need to know the name of the librarian who appears just once in the story. We do not need to know what Tate and his father ordered at the diner, etc., etc. To me, these details are humdrum distractions from the flow of the story.

I was not convinced by Kya's having a string of books published. We do understand that she inherited artistic flair from her mother, so illustrating her notes on the wildlife is likely, but I did not think she could cope with the complications involved in having them published. I also did not "buy" her roaming about the marsh quoting poetry - and I did not "buy" it in the grand reveal at the end,

when the mystery at the heart of the book is solved. I am being a bit vague here, in case this is read by someone who hasn't finished it yet, or who has yet to start!

So, this book is not going on my bookshelf, perhaps to be read again, but will be passed on to others who may get more out of it than I did!

Alix

I really enjoyed this book. I read it about a year ago and then recommended it to the Realm of Books.

Reading it again I think I appreciated it even more. Maybe because I read more at a sitting than I usually can.

Kya Clark (called by the locals "The Marsh Girl" comes from a poor family who live in the Marsh area on the N. Carolina Coast. Kya's father is a drunk who beats her mum and the children. The story opens with the mother leaving on the verge of a breakdown and one by one her older siblings all leave as well.

Kya is aged 6 at the time and spends her time in the Marsh with the wildlife and nature which she becomes an expert on when she is older writing many books with illustrations of shells, birds, trees etc. She keeps out of her father's way as much as possible and return to sleep on her mattress in the porch. Her father goes away a lot. There is one time when he is more approachable and actually shows Kya how to use his boat to navigate the water around the marshes.

Kya becomes friendly with Tate when they are young and he teaches her to read and shows her more of the hidden water ways. They are in love but sadly Tate goes away to Uni and does not contact her when he returns for years.

Meanwhile she has become involved with Chase Andrews who is not a nice character. He does not think Kya will fit in with his friends and he is dating other girls behind her back. He then gets married but still continues to date other girls.

Kya's brother Jodie returns to see Kya and stays for a while.

She becomes successful with her book writing and has many published and is able to afford to modernise the shack more.

She becomes friendly with Tate again but feels she can not trust him not to leave her again.

Chase still comes to try and meet her and on one occasion nearly rapes her. They have a fight and Kya escapes half clothed to escape in her boat. She is seen by local fishermen.

Chase's body is discovered with no footprints or any sign of anyone having been there. Kya is a suspect and there is a court case and she is found guilty of his murder and sent to prison. Kya has an alibi that says she was out of town at the time of the murder as she had gone to visit her Publisher and has been seen on buses around the time Chase was murdered. She had given Chase a necklace on rawhide with a shell which he wore always. When his body was found the shell had gone.

Kya was released from prison and she and Tate become like a married couple and are very happy. He makes her a lab for all her specimens for her books.

Kya's only other friends were Jumpin who ran the Gas station/shop and his wife Mabel who were very kind to Kya when she was a young girl. Mabel giving her old clothes and Jumpin selling her

mussels to give her money to buy essentials like gas for the boat and essential food stuff? grits? like oats for porridge?

When Kya is 64 she does not return home and Tate finds her dead in her boat floating along. He is devastated. He decides to remain at the shack as his work as a marine biologist is done mainly in the Marshland.

He is searching for some vital documents like Kya's documents to say she owned the land where the shack is and around when he finds a box which showed that she had a nom de plume and had had many poems published. A poem called the Firefly confessed to the murder of Chase and also the shell pendant is there. Tate burned all the poems and the rawhide that the shell was on and then took the shell and threw it back into the sea. Kya's secret re. murdering Chase was safe.

It is left right to the end of the book for us to discover that Kya had come back and had taken her boat out secretly and had in fact murdered Chase and covered her tracks very well with alibi of being away from the area at that time.

I think this book was very cleverly written with lovely detail of the natural area the sea, the flora and fauna and the descriptions of the strong character of a child left alone to cope in the Marsh and how well Kya survived with only a very few friends to help and support her. I feel a bit lost without this book now but look forward to finishing our next choice which I started but never finished.