

The Canada Project

Claudia Cattaneo

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In the thriller The Canada Project, a careful, persistent reporter uncovers dangerous extremism in the oil industry.

In Claudia Cattaneo's heart-stopping thriller *The Canada Project*, the interests of the press, the oil industry, environmentalists, and Indigenous leaders conflict.

A newspaper reporter, Elise, is offered an exclusive with John, a billionaire Canadian oil industry giant. He's charming, but also conceited—a married playboy in a loveless marriage who engages in affairs. He's also a formidable businessman. But during their interview, Elise is disappointed by John's lackluster responses and hard-to-get attitude. Later, he pursues her romantically, but Elise is wary. In part because she cannot have an unprofessional relationship with her subjects, she distances herself from John, drawing clear boundaries. But John offers her new and enticing scoops, ensnaring her with his power plays and misdirection, all to achieve his own gains. Later, Elise's friend Jordan kindles a romantic relationship with her while she runs from John's far-reaching industry plays and overbearing attitude. Concerned about her livelihood and well-being, Elise navigates corporate, political, and emotional strains throughout.

Meanwhile, John's rival from another oil company, Susan, engages in backhanded efforts to increase her profits and reputation. Both she and John sideline the concerns of environmentalists and the requests of Indigenous leaders in favor of their corporate strategies. A First Nations chief, Anne, is told that her people do not deserve oil revenue because they did not invest in it—despite a large well of oil being discovered beneath their ancestral land. And two environmental activists, Barb and Erika, work to disrupt oil production and influence the stock market—though they also misuse images of Indigenous leaders for their own fundraising purposes.

Sensory descriptions of the scenery and climate set the mood in many scenes. When Elise drives to meet with John for the first time, the brewing blizzard is a foreboding omen to the maelstrom of the relationship to come. Filtered through a broad arc of time, the retrace of events is distant and neutral, written like a report itself, both jarring and frightening in its reveal of people's words and actions. The book's development of relationships and handling of controversial topics is restrained, if also marked by storms of one-time deals and deceptions. People argue about environmentalism and the oil industry; some have difficulty acknowledging wrongdoings on both sides. Piquant questions are raised about the environmentalist groups' true motivations and about whether the press is selling out to cover big oil. These extensive conflicts propel the novel, whose forward movement is further spurred by Elise's work and personal struggles.

In the thriller *The Canada Project*, a careful, persistent reporter uncovers dangerous extremism in the oil industry.

ALI ORTIZ (October 18, 2022)

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