

Under Nushagak Bluff

Mia Heavener

Boreal Books (Nov 12, 2019)

Softcover \$17.95 (232pp)

978-1-59709-809-0

In Mia Heavener's emotional novel *Under Nushagak Bluff*, three generations of Indigenous Alaskan women are the focus.

Set during the 1930s and 1940s, the book is gripping and understated. It takes place in Nushagak, a remote fishing town, and focuses on the lives of the women who live there, as well as with Alaskan struggles with being an incorporated US territory. Men from all over the world drift in and out of their Bristol Bay for cannery work and fishing, bringing change.

Imbued with Alaskan Indigenous language, folklore, and myths, the text is rich and deep. It begins by focusing on the relationship between Marulia and her daughter, Anne Girl. Their skiff is damaged by a boat owned by John Nelson, a Norwegian man who came to Bristol Bay to fish. Though Marulia finds him useless as a fisherman and as a cannery worker, Anne Girl is intrigued by his Scandinavian coloring and ability to tell interesting stories. John and Anne Girl marry and have a daughter, Ellen.

The schism between Native Alaskan cultures and those of the migrant men who worked in Alaska are explored, in part through John and Anne Girl's gender roles in their relationship, which draw on the longstanding expectations of their community. John becomes a pilot to transport goods between Dillingham and Nushagak; Anne Girl passes on her fishing skills and knowledge of local tradition to Ellen. Direct language mirrors the landscape and culture, and the story's emotional vicissitudes are subtle, too, reflecting the practical stoicism and the skeptical outlook of its characters.

Under Nushagak Bluff is slight and compelling, portraying its settings well and capturing original voices. Its story of generational inheritances and expectations, fate, and loyalty is filtered through the tough voices of Alaskan women.

MONICA CARTER (November / December 2019)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.