



Book Review: The Distant Hours

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Kate Morton is quickly becoming one of my favourite authors.

In "The Distant Hours," published in 2010, Ms. Morton captivates the reader through a complex plot that involves interesting characters. She uses a very unique style in which she moves from one decade to another and back again in order to weave details that unite the five parts of this book into a comprehensive whole.

The story narrator, Edith "Edie" Burchill, is a young woman who works for a book publisher. As a child, her mother gave her a copy of "The True History of the Mud Man" by Raymond Blyth which quickly became her favourite book. It was many years later that Edie began to realize that her own mother had a personal connection not only with the author of this book, but also with his daughters. Her curiosity and her mother's reluctance to talk about this, led her to begin searching for information about Milderhurst Castle and the eccentric spinster sisters with whom her mother had actually lived when she was evacuated and billeted there as a child during the World War II.

Edie uses her knowledge and connections in the publishing world to gather facts but also makes a visit to the Castle where she observes without revealing her true motivations for being there. Her research makes Edie and the reader aware of the importance of not just the residents but also those who worked at the Castle as well as the people who lived nearby.

When her father becomes ill and is confined to bed, Edie finds that the "Mud Man" book actually draws them together as they read it and try to figure out why the book was written.

One of the key turning points in Edie's search for answers is when her aunt gives her letters that her mother had written to the family when she was billeted at Milderhurst Castle. Even though Edie is thrilled about the pieces that they provide her, this is not the case with her mother who is extremely upset when she finds out that Edie has the letters and has read them.

This book reveals the fact that both the Burchill and Blyth families have many secrets that have been hidden for years. Some are buried in history and others in the minds of individuals. And as Edie digs into the past and builds relationships with the other characters, she begins to understand how each secret contributes to the attitudes and behaviours of the others who were connected to the Castle. It is interesting to note that as the secrets are revealed, the characters grow closer. In fact, Edie and her mother not only learn more about each other, but also build a stronger relationship than either might have expected.

I loved this book! The plot was not only captivating but also cleverly intricate. Each of the 562 pages contributed to the story line and offered surprises that proved to be fascinating and yet, at the same time, made sense.

"The Distant Hours" is a wonderful read that totally captured my attention and left me eager to move from one chapter to the next. In fact, even though this is a large book, I found myself at the end of it, thirsting for more.

An added bonus is the Readers Club Guide that offers Suggested Discussion Points.