



Dessyre (des-i-ray): Inspired by Actual Events

B. John Burns III

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Spotlighting the labyrinthine nature of immigration proceedings through the story of a captivating woman, Dessyre (des-i-ray) is a revealing novel.

A stalwart Midwestern musician becomes obsessed with a mysterious woman in B. John Burns III's novel *Dessyre (des-i-ray)*.

Sixty-seven-year-old Alvey plays on a regular musical “circuit of eastern Kansas and Missouri.” Though he’s given up on dreams of superstardom, he has a local fan base and makes a decent living through appearances at farmers’ markets, festivals, and taverns. Following a performance in a university town, Alvey is approached by Dessyre, an engaging woman with “piercing brown eyes, bronzed complexion and flowing brunette waves.” Flattered by her attention yet suspicious of her motives, Alvey talks to the woman in the “quiet moonlight,” then drives her to a Topeka homeless shelter.

Alvey’s initial encounter with Dessyre leads to his slow spiral of fascination with her. He finds her criminal mugshot online and follows her trial proceedings on public court websites. He discovers that because she is an undocumented Canadian, her initial arrest for theft has led to more serious charges. Further, Dessyre is an alias; her real name is Marisa. Alvey scours the internet for biographical information about Dessyre, attends her court hearing, and contacts her in prison.

The Midwest setting is fleshed out with mentions of local barbecue specialties and Kansas City’s Khe Sanh homeless veteran community. And an evocative parallel is drawn when Alvey first meets Dessyre in the summer of 2023 and observes hazy smoke from Canadian grassfires: like these smoldering remnants, Canadian-born Dessyre drifts into Alvey’s life.

The omniscient and loquacious narrative mirrors Alvey’s self-described “obsession” with Dessyre. However, while the book fleshes out Alvey’s life as a musician, showing him hauling equipment from one gig to the next and modifying his song list for more “family friendly” venues, it offers less detail about his interior life and about the lives of other characters. Alvey has no predatory motives; his fixation upon the beautiful, streetwise Dessyre stays within the boundaries of friendship and moral support. His wife, Margaret, is a vague presence, with minimal characterization beyond her settled relationship with Alvey and seeming lack of objection to his interest in Dessyre.

When it comes to Dessyre, the book is more exhaustive with its details, ranging from her South African and Brazilian heritage to her birth date and birth weight. As a girl, she created the more confident persona of Dessyre to handle challenging situations. Dessyre’s adolescence, journalism efforts, Marine Corps service, and tempestuous involvement with her common-law husband are also revealed. Her immigration problems stem from her parents’ failure to file citizenship documentation; after she is deported to Vancouver, headstrong Dessyre makes an illegal return to Kansas City.

The novel spotlights the labyrinthine nature of immigration proceedings, with the noted irony that Dessyre has lived in the US since infancy. But though she's depicted as having considerable journalistic talents, the "storyteller" and "story finder" Dessyre does not utilize independent media to publicize her plight. She later advocates for the Canadian homeless, but her original bureaucratic odyssey, including being marginalized and endangered as an illegal migrant, remains obscured. And while the novel succeeds in conveying how charismatic Dessyre enlivens Alvey's staid routines, that same sense of captivation often subsumes its plot—and the innermost life of Alvey, whose earlier musical ambitions and marital backstory are absent, leading to a sense of imbalance, in particular given the cavalcade of details regarding Dessyre.

In the focused novel *Dessyre (des-i-ray)*, immigration entanglements lead to an unusual connection.

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