



## Flotsam

**Patricia Boomsma**

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*An Indigenous woman goes missing, prompting interpersonal reckonings, in the emotionally hefty novel Flotsam.*

The search for a missing woman evokes strong emotions in those investigating the crime in Patricia Boomsma's mystery novel *Flotsam*.

Kelly is a busy attorney and a single mother. A gruesome, attention-grabbing find—a dismembered foot, still in its shoe—brings her into contact with an Indigenous woman, Therese. Therese asks Kelly to find her missing daughter—a woman others have written off. Kelly and her few allies devote weeks to the lonely search, hoping bring peace to Therese, whose plight is both singular and all too common. And in the course of her work, Kelly also confronts her own traumatic past and tries to rebuild the fractured relationships with those she cares about.

Kelly's dilemmas include her changing relationship with Connor, a detective who agrees to help her search for Therese's daughter. Together, they face an infuriating, tangled mess of bureaucratic hoops and indifferent and overworked investigators. The search takes them to a range of locations too, including a casino and into the desolate Washington wilderness. All the while, Kelly's parenting troubles with her adopted daughter, Ruth—a secretive teenager who often sneaks out at night—serve as a poignant counterpoint to Therese's relationship with her own rebellious daughter.

Switching perspectives to build suspense, the book includes a subplot about a tormented paratrooper whose tragic life story plays out years before Kelly's. It seems unrelated to the main story at first; later, it connects to Kelly's search in fascinating, unexpected ways. And hints at the missing woman's fate come through the perspective of a wild dog whose path intersects hers at critical points. Still, Kelly and Ruth are the best-developed characters in the cast. Ruth chafes at her mother's overprotectiveness and long working hours; Kelly's fears for her daughter are exacerbated by Therese's plight. Combined with Kelly and Connor's dedication to the case, the small family's gradual work toward more open and honest communication is enriching.

The mystery itself is straightforward in comparison to the book's interpersonal dynamics; throughout, people are driven toward revelations of personal and professional truths. However, throughout the book, the Indigenous characters, their culture, and the systemic issues highlighted—including the large number of missing Indigenous women and the racism that hampers and prevents rescue efforts—play a secondary role to other actions and struggles. As a result, the non-Indigenous characters' discussions of problems that Indigenous people face often feel performative. Further, the tribe that the missing woman belongs to, the Nininpak, appears to be fictional, resulting in added distance.

In the mystery novel *Flotsam*, complicated mother-daughter relationships color a search for a missing woman.

EILEEN GONZALEZ (February 6, 2024)

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