



## Sweetland

*Michael Crummey*

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For twelve generations, when the fish were plentiful and when they all-but disappeared, the inhabitants of this remote island in Newfoundland have lived and died together. Now, in the second decade of the 21st century, they are facing resettlement, and each has been offered a generous compensation package to leave. But the money is offered with a proviso: everyone has to go; the government won't be responsible for one crazy coot who chooses to stay alone on an island.

That coot is Moses Sweetland. Motivated in part by a sense of history and belonging, haunted by memories of the short and lonely time he spent away from his home as a younger man, and concerned that his somewhat eccentric great-nephew will wilt on the mainland, Moses refuses to leave. But in the face of determined, sometimes violent, opposition from his family and his friends, Sweetland is eventually swayed to sign on to the government's plan. Then a tragic accident prompts him to fake his own death and stay on the deserted island. As he manages a desperately diminishing food supply, and battles against the ravages of weather, Sweetland finds himself in the company of the vibrant ghosts of the former islanders, whose porch lights still seem to turn on at night.

## **Sweetland Details**

Date : Published August 19th 2014 by Doubleday Canada

ISBN : 9780385663168

Author : Michael Crummey

Format : Hardcover 322 pages

Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Canada, Historical, Historical Fiction, Literary Fiction

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## From Reader Review Sweetland for online ebook

### Jennifer says

I struggled mightily with what to say about this book, and how to even classify my own thoughts. Other people have described it much better than I'm capable of doing now. (I'm thinking especially of Diane's review ).

What I will say is:

- Above all, I loved the characters in this book, especially the seemingly simple but utterly complex Moses Sweetland
- I'm glad I read this
- I've learned that as a reader I don't have much appreciation for "magical realism" (or anything in that realm). A deficiency on my part, for sure (it's one of the reasons why most people loved The Snow Child and I just thought it was so-so). Sweetland contained many sequences that stretched the imagination, and I'm afraid mine is just a bit too fixed.

I listened to the audio version. The narrator had the most unique accent (perhaps he's a true Newfoundland). I had to slow down the narration to be at a pace slower than what I usually listen to audio books. This may have contributed to my feeling that the book went on for just too long.

3.5 stars

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### Valerie says

It isn't often one has the privilege of reading a nearly perfect book - but this book is it, a jewel. I'm weeping as I write this - saddened that it's over. I loved Sweetland, the people, the sounds, their lives and I'm feeling bereft at the loss of them until I re-read this book and relish its beauty once again.

Exquisitely written, powerful, gentle, lyrical this is a magnificent book. I can still feel the people of Sweetland pulsing away in my mind, they will live with me a very long time.

And Justin Hosker - thank you for introducing me to Michael Crummey's work.

To anyone who might read this review - read this book and revel in its beauty, you won't be sorry.

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### Krista says

Moses Sweetland is the embodiment of a Newfoundland that's disappearing: twelve generations of Sweetlands gave their name to the tiny and inhospitable island off the southern coast of Newfoundland, and in his lifetime, Moses was part of the Toronto-based diaspora that left home in search of a quick buck in the

70's, a codfisher until the 90's moratorium, a lighthouse keeper until it was automated, and now, the final holdout in a government plan to relocate the community to the mainland -- and as everyone must sign on for the program to take effect, Moses is under pressure (from subtle to menacing) to take the deal.

With Sweetland, Michael Crummey has written a book that, although exotic to me, rings true with every word, interaction, and plot detail: this is a part of Newfoundland that I've never seen but, somehow, recognise and believe. This is undoubtedly Crummey's goal as he has characters react to other books set in Newfoundland, beginning with Queenie, whose Edmonton-based daughter sends her books in an attempt to elevate her mother's reading tastes (with "serious books -- literary novels, prize-winners, Oprah's picks".)

Queenie never cracked a spine, but for the few written by Newfoundlanders or about Newfoundland. She took those on as a kind of patriotic duty, though it was torture to get through them. They were every one depressing, she said. Or nothing happened. Or there was no point to the story. Half the books supposedly set in Newfoundland were nowhere Queenie recognized and she felt insulted by their claim on her life. They all sounds like they were written by townies, she liked to say.

And by "townies" I assume she means St. John's -- the only part of the Rock I've seen, and the "big city" that most residents of Sweetland have never before visited. Although the residents of this outport yet live in a way that would not be wholly unrecognisable to their grandparents (heating with wood stoves, snaring rabbits and jigging for cod, hauling up seaweed to fertilise a vegetable garden), the reader never forgets that this is today: now the young men go off to Fort Mac and the oilfields, and Moses' great-nephew Jesse has gotten the old man online. Moses calls the internet, *A window they could peer through to watch the modern world unfold in its myriad variations, while only the smallest, strangest fragments washed ashore on the island.* But for all the anachronisms, there is nothing cute or sweet about this book: this is a 100% believable story about complex people living fully human lives. As for the writing, the dialogue is idiosyncratic without being impenetrable or played for laughs and the exposition is in gorgeous language without being florid or sentimental (and you remember that Crummey has been primarily a poet: not because he plays with language here, but because he chooses his language so carefully). And, above all, this book broke my heart. Even a retired construction worker-codfisher-lighthouse keeper can have existential crises:

He hated confronting those lost moments, being presented with some detail from his past and having to look on it like a stranger. It made his life feel like a made-up thing. A net full of holes.

And:

A life was no goddamn thing in the end, he thought. Bits-and-pieces of make-believe cobbled together to look halfways human, like some stick-and-rag doll meant to scare crows out of the garden. No goddamn thing at all.

I am sorry that I didn't really like Galore, but this is the third time that Crummey has blown me away and just goes to prove that, while I might not always care for the magical and mythical, I am definitely open to the folkloric and ethereal; and wherever that dividing line lies, Crummey has situated a novel that worked for me on every level; this book is funny and instructive and dramatic and touching. Definitely my early pick for this year's Giller Prize.

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### **jo says**

this great review by michael collins gives the sorrowful background for this story, so get yourself over there and read it. or not. cuz in spite of the fact that michael collins says that mainland canadians cannot understand this book, this non-canadian got it just fine. everything he says. i got it all.

sweetland is a really lovely character. the book is a bit of a paean to the loss of a certain kind of masculinity. when authors celebrate lost masculinity they get heavy on the technical language, and this book is so rich with technical, specific, particular language, i defy anyone to understand every word in any page at all.

the language is the language of fishing, hunting, of landscape, maintenance, husbandry. it's the language of a lost world and is therefore highly elegiac. it's beautiful and lovely and male but it's nice-male and women are treated well by the book.

in fact, masculinity is investigated tenderly and deeply in this book, where sexual doing and sexual not-doing walk hand in hand, and no one is violent except in childish silly ways. the community of sweetland-the-island takes care of its own, not only the weakest, but also those whom people are otherwise angry at. no one is unloved. there is a home and soup and liquor for everyone.

tender masculinity is also a dying masculinity, as more aggressive, more impersonal forms of maleness -- the government, the oil industry -- barge in and push the people out.

tender masculinity has immense respect for the strength and value of women.

there are heartbreaking moments in this book, which is altogether heartbreaking. but it's fabulous reading, well-constructed storytelling, incredible language and a tribute of love to a lost place.

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### **Dianne says**

I must have walked past this book on the "New Books" library shelf four or five times. I would pick it up, read the blurb on the inside cover, and think, "Nope. Not my kind of book" and put it back. Finally, I added it to my stack and took it home. I sat on the couch with my stack of goodies from the library and opened the book to scan the first few pages. A couple of days later, I sat on the same couch, gutted.

"Sweetland" is about a 69 year old man named Moses Sweetland who lives on an island, also named Sweetland, off the coast of Newfoundland. The government is offering a hefty relocation sum to the remaining members of the community, only if ALL of them agree to leave so the government can save money by ceasing to provide essential services to the island. Moses Sweetland does not want to leave his

home and is soon the lone hold-out. He begins to find threatening letters hidden in his house and someone sets his fishing shack ablaze. Still, he resists until he comes up with a plan. The plan and its consequences make up the remarkable second half of the book.

“Sweetland” is so very beautifully constructed and fleshed out. I loved Moses Sweetland, who is a solitary figure; a man of few words and a wry and sarcastic wit. I loved the colorful and eccentric characters who are Sweetland’s friends, family and neighbors. And I loved the island and its vanishing way of life. This is one of those books where the location itself is a full blown character – much like Iceland in “Burial Rites.”

This book will break your heart over and over again – but for me, these are the books that resonate and live on in my memory. If you liked “Stoner,” “Peace Like a River,” and maybe if you are a Kent Haruf fan, this book may be for you. As Moses Sweetland would say, “It’s the best kind.”

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### **Chrissie says**

ETA: There are two more reasons why this book disappointed me. There is no discussion of a government's right to move people out of the hinterlands, to force them to live where everybody else lives. Obviously this is cheaper for the state! There is no analysis of this whatsoever - nothing about economics, safety, education, public facilities. In the way the offer is set out, in that all agree or the deal is off, the focus is shifted to the pressure of neighbors, fellow island inhabitants. Two completely different themes. Secondly, there is practically nothing about life on Newfoundland. No history at all. You do not learn about Newfoundland. The book is not about place. This is a book about family relationships, suicide and mental retardation. It is important this is made clear to prospective readers.

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I assume you have read the book description, so go read it if you haven't.

Quite simply, I need clarity in a book and this book is as far from that as black is from white. Dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations and the present time story are all interwoven. I kept asking, "Did that just happen or was it a hallucination?" Maybe I am just too dumb, but I spent the whole time trying to figure out what the hell was actually taking place and what was simply in Moses' head? Moses Sweetland is the central character. Should he leave? Should he stay? Or..... logical Chrissie kept thinking, "Does he really have a choice?" If you want to get into the head of a delusional old man this is the book for YOU!

So I did not enjoy this book, BUT the author draws places beautifully. I am not talking about scenery as much as the feel of a place or a situation or a person. There are very good lines. Only one example: there is a visiting government official and he struts around with a briefcase under his arm - as if he were born with that briefcase there, glued under his arm. Think abo it ....you've seen men like that! I am giving this book two stars because it is OK, but it is only the lines that made me like the book at all. Sweetland's confusion drove me nuts. It's true, maybe the author wanted to depict exactly that!

As usual, my view of the audiobook narration does not influence my rating. I used to absolutely adore audiobooks narrated by John Lee. If you have listened to him you will immediately recognize the special lilt of his voice. He sings the lines. His intonation goes up when most people's go down. Here in this story you

have old cantankerous rough men and they just would not sound like this! I absolutely detested the narration. To appreciate the lines, I had to think very hard to not listen to what I was hearing. My advice? Read the paper book, don't listen to the audiobook. If you are like me, well then don't even read it.

All my friends love this book. I don't. I kept wondering, "What is wrong with me?" Well, here I have explained what bothered me.

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### **Jill says**

It is rare that the trajectory of a novel can be surmised by a character's name. But in Moses Sweetland, Mr. Crummey's cantankerous and fiercely honest character, the author may well be signaling the key themes of his novel.

Moses, of course, is the Exodus hero of the Bible, a story that begins in Genesis. An important prophet, born in a time when his people were an enslaved minority, he demands release. And Sweetland speaks for itself. In this novel, Sweetland also represents a remote island off Newfoundland. Based partially on fact (after Newfoundland joined Canada, the government instituted a resettlement program, forcing thousands of citizens to relocate, abandoning their centuries-old lifestyles).

As the novel begins, the government is offering the residents of Sweetland a magnanimous resettlement program with one catch: every person must sign on. Many are glad to do so, but not Moses. Now in his early 70s and unmarried, his homeland is everything to him. Symbolism abounds: Moses worked as Sweetland's lightkeeper ("let there be light") until the lighthouse was automated. He is, in ways, the "priest" of the island: saving a boatload of fleeing Sri Lankans, paying tribute to the dead, and standing up to the pervasive lure of money in exchange for generations of history.

Ghosts haunt his memories: ghosts of the Sri Lankans, his now-gone sister who was forced into a loveless marriage with a decent man, his "almost" fiancée, his dead brother. Accompanied at different times by a young boy named Jesse who may be on the autistic spectrum and later, the dog of the other last hold-out to the deal (aptly named Loveless), Moses must primarily rely on his own survival instincts. As ghosts and memories crowd his brain, he begins to understand that life is nothing more than a made-up thing, with "bits and pieces of make-believe cobbled together to look halfways human."

Make no mistake, though, Mr. Crummey does not subjugate his plot or his characters to his overriding themes. The characters are achingly real: Moses' good friend Queenie Coffin (again, the symbolism of names) who is an agoraphobic who remains indoors feasting on badly-written romance novels; his one-time great friend Duke Fewer, who maintains the only barbershop without ever actually giving a haircut; Pilgrim, his blind brother-in-law; and perhaps most of all, Jesse, the quirky and dearly-loved boy who Moses befriends.

Sweetland made me sad...but it also made me think and it made me feel. If that's not a 5 star, I don't know what is.

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## Michael says

This one crept up on me and bowled me over with the stubborn and quiet heroism of a character who resists the inevitable destruction of his way of life and loss of his rural community.

Moses Sweetland lives on a Newfoundland island named after his ancestors. Decades after the commercial cod fishery shut down, most capable ambitious residents have gone to elsewhere in Canada to seek work, leaving mostly misfits and the elderly behind to cling to the old ways. Sweetland has been totally bound into the lives of these people and the place his whole life. Now the government doesn't want to pay the tab for services to the community and is enticing them to move to the mainland with generous compensation payoffs, which they all must agree to. Sweetland and one of his neighbors are the only holdouts.

Despite pressures from community members to give in, Sweetland keeps to the patterns of his life. He knows every rocky hill and meadow on the island, every shoal and cove of its shores, and he finds purpose in partaking in the rhythms of nature and changing tasks that the seasons bring. He lives alone, plays online poker, cuts a lot of wood, fishes, gardens, and snares rabbits for food. All could be fine if it weren't for the people he loves slowly dying off or disappearing.

In his circle is a man who was addled from drinking kerosene as a kid, a blind man his school friend married out of pity, an agoraphobic woman who partakes of life through her window and trashy romance novels, a barber whose shop is a social haven instead of a place for haircuts, a retired priest hiding out from some unknown past, and a pair of loutish brothers always out for a lark. I found this cast well crafted and far from the trend of authors to create quirky characters for entertainment and humor. They have depth and bear important secrets Sweetland spins out through his memories, and most retain dignity and courage. They are broken as individuals, but somehow as a community they achieve a worthy wholeness.

Sweetland's most significant connection is with a teen-aged boy Jesse, the child of his niece Clara and a subject to some variant of autism. Clara has recently had him checked out by a specialist in St. John:

*“Have they got a name for it yet?” he asked.*

*“For what?”*

*“For whatever is wrong with the youngster.”*

*“There’s a spectrum... “And he isn’t typical, is what they’re telling me.”*

*“I could’ve told you that much for free,” he said. “Saved you the trip.”*

He frequently takes Jesse along on his various forays and tasks, plays games and jokes with him. In turn the boy teaches him to use a computer, educates him on the wonders of science, shares movies like “Titanic” with him, and, through his perpetual questions, forces him to revisit many memories of family and events that shaped his soul. Such as the time Sweetland helped save a group of Sri Lankan refugees put to sea in a small boat by those paid to smuggle them. Another tie that binds is that a brother of his that died tragically when Sweetland was a kid is a constant imaginary companion of the boy. His resolve not to leave the island is supported by a deep belief he shares with Clara: “Jesse won’t be happy nowhere else than here...I know that for a fact.”

An important wellspring of Sweetland's memories concerns his younger sister Ruthie, Clara's mother, dead at the time of this story. He remembers carrying her down the stairs in the morning before others were up, start the fire, frying up her breakfast, and helping her to the outhouse. Giving her a ride to pick berries, “Ruthie singing in his ear as payment for the ride”. Once their uppity rooster slashed her and he immediately

bashed it to death. That memory Crummey creates for Sweetland makes him come alive for me:

*That's a waste of good meat, Uncle Char said, scraping the ragged mess up with a shovel.*

*Sweetland was still in a lather. He could hear Ruthie bawling in the kitchen where Hollis was holding her arms while their mother stitched the girl's lobe in place. He swung at the animal as Uncle Char walked past him, wanting to kill the thing dead over again. The ring of wood against the shovel making his elbows tingle. He stamped on the ruined corpse where it fell to the ground.*

*Bist thee done? Uncle Char asked him.*

*I'm done, Sweetland said. Though he was not, and likely never would be.*

At a certain point, Sweetland figures out a way to stay behind alone on the island after everyone else has left. We come to understand why this refuge is so vital to him, why he never married, how his attempt to make a living elsewhere failed. We root for him to succeed against the tough odds that nature and accidents ply against his foolhardy choice. An abandoned dog becomes a special companion and focus of his beleaguered humanity. It becomes hard to draw the line between noble effort and madness.

Literary scholars will find plenty of metaphors and allegorical references to play with in this mélange of characters and memories. Mostly I felt them seeping underground in my experience of this elegiac tale. Tragic losses do pile up, but I didn't feel my emotions were being wrenched just for the sake of emotional engagement and melodrama. I felt some of the same satisfaction I get from post-apocalyptic stories like Peter Heller's "Dog Stars" and the rich rewards I gained from the mix of bleakness and humor present in Proulx's "The Shipping News" and McMurtry's "The Last Picture Show.".

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## **DeB MaRtEnS says**

First of all, Sweetland is not an especially likeable novel. It is meant to impact you with its literary voice, it's strong point of view, a vehicle mourning a change in the traditional focus of Newfounders' lives and work and a testamentary to the love of that history, its people's practical skills and a headstone for a vanishing tribe of people and way of life.

The island named after Moses Sweetland's forbears is being evicted: no ferry service, school, electricity, source of gasoline, daily sundries at the local store, phone service, emergency access but are getting a buyout package as long as 100% agree.

Moses Sweetland refuses to leave, putting the buyout promise in jeopardy. Who will Moses be without the island?

The novel is very well written, admirably cast and beautifully descriptive of the mood and landscape.

However, it is a bleak mournful book that taught me little other than give notice that the newest batch of Newfie writers have taken up their pens.

Reviewer Nicholas Herring of the Puritan wrote "an impressively prolonged and often exhausting study of grief and ghosts centering around the disintegration of 69 year old Moses Sweetland."

Give me Donna Morrissey any day. Dour, crispy, Newfoundland hooch as "best there is".

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## Cheryl says

This author Michael Crummey does know his arse from a dory — unlike the hapless Toronto journalist writing about the “authentic Newfoundland” and disparaged by the book’s main character, Moses Sweetland.

Sweetland. From the old family of Swietlund. Several generations in a small village on the coast of Newfoundland. They lived the traditional Newfoundland fishing life. The men and the boys out on the seas, or out in the backwoods trapping and hunting. The women on land, salting and preserving the fish, tending hostile gardens, and sharing the communal poverty. With increasing mechanization, these fishing outports weren’t economically viable. It cost too much for providing electricity, water, schools, ferries etc. The collapse of the cod stocks accelerated the collapse of those societies. Villages that had existed for hundreds of years were abandoned, as part of government-sponsored forced resettlement programs.

This story speaks for the hundreds of outport villages in Newfoundland which were bought out, dismantled and relocated over the last half of the twentieth century.

(It’s happening again.

A picturesque outport, Little Bay Islands, is considering whether to accept a relocation deal that would pay the residents \$250,000 to leave. If 90% approve, they will be relocated and all services will be withdrawn. Not everyone is in favour. I wonder if this community provided inspiration for this book because their circumstances are eerily similar. (<http://globalnews.ca/news/852263/newf...>)

Waves of menfolk fanned out across Canada, in search of jobs in construction, bridge building, mining, and lately the oil sands out west in northern Alberta. Working hard, drinking and drugging hard, living rough, but making good money so that their families back home can be supported. *“Economic refugees mourning the anachronistic little world they’d abandoned, the squat saltboxes that housed three generations, the brawling weather, the root cellars and fish flakes and outhouses, the rabbit warren of bloodlines knitting the tiny outports into impossible tangles.”*

Some people seek and even embrace change, some are carried along like flotsam on the tide. Some fight it furiously, and some try to ignore it in the hopes it will just go away. How do you let go of the place that holds your life, your memories, and the ghosts of your families? To move forward you have to look ahead and stop looking behind. In the meantime there is grief over loss of family, loss of opportunities, loss of potential, loss of a way of life, loss of community.

Sweetland doesn’t want the deal. The old codger is the last holdout. He needs to finish his grieving. And in the process he will lose and then find his way.

The story searches for itself in the first third, but be patient. It asserts itself and begins to coalesce midway, and then in glorious Crummey-fashion, it soars.

*(Thanks to Random House for ARC via NetGalley.)*

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### Diane S ? says

How does one measure the value of a man's life? Is it the house he lives in? The amount of possessions he has? The family and friends who love him or those he loves? Twelve generations have lived on the island of Sweetland, a mythical place off the Newfoundland coast, they have made due with little and supported each other through hard times. The governments price is 100,000 dollars, but only if everyone leaves the island. Many accept, this is their chance to have an easier life and that is a lot of money. Their are a few holdouts but then only one is left. Moses Sweetland and this is his story.

His life his here, his memories, his secrets and he has all the comforts he needs. He plays video poker, has his niece and her son. It is her son he is most worried about, Jesse is a little different and doesn't take well to change. Soon the pressure for Moses to change his mind is taken to extreme measures and he will reluctantly give in and accept the offer. But after a tragedy ensues, he decides on an act that will set the stage for the rest of the book.

A wonderful story that really resonated for me, got under my skin. This is a quiet book, really atmospheric and it was easy for me to envision myself traveling along with Moses. A survival story about hanging on and its dangers and a look back in his memories so that the reader gets a very well rounded look into his character. He is a difficult old man, now at the age of seventy, with a sarcastic sense of humor. Yet he is content with his life as it is and doesn't want it to change, doesn't see why it should. A book and a character that I won't soon forget.

Arc from publisher.

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### Carol says

Oh what thoughts the imagination can conjure up.....(*both mine and those of Moses*)

Despite sinister threats and an inviting \$100k incentive, stubborn 69 year old Moses Sweetland is determined **not** to leave his beloved home in Chance Cove, but ultimately finds himself living in the eerie stillness of a ghost town. (*no spoiler here*)

And while I admit it took some time to make character connections and get into a comfortable reading groove, I *really* did like Moses, his sarcasm, his take charge ways and his homeland on an island of Newfoundland from the very start, **however**.....

By the end of the novel, I was a bit perplexed (*alright a lot perplexed*) so I called my trusty GR friend Susan with my issues, (view spoiler) and was told I was basically overthinking the story. So ok Susan, Occam's Razor it is!

Great heartfelt story!

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## Agnieszka says

Sweetland, what an equivocal name. Remote, tiny island on the Atlantic, part of Newfoundland. There used to be a fishing settlement but when novel starts it is half empty, inhabited by the old and misfits of all descriptions. Due to economic reasons Canadian government offered to them a good price for leaving and moving on the continent. Most of residents accepted the proposal. With one exception.

Moses Sweetland, whose ancestors were the first ones who inhabited the island, is the only one who decided to stay and not abandon his household. He will not be like his biblical namesake who led his people to the promised land. Because Moses just loves his home country and if there was any patch of ground he could name as own it would be this severe island.

Sweetland, now retired lighthouse keeper, spent his whole life here and, not counting some trips to nearby islets, only one time departed to *damn Toronto*. And nothing good came of it. Sweetland is stubborn and crusty but he loves that place dearly. He feels welded with this forbidding region, grey ubiquity of the ocean, jagged cliffs, misty hills, green meadows where buffalos once used to graze. He's attracted by the gently rolling hills, murmur of the rain, roar of the ocean, even unpredictable, brawling weather. As if, he and the island, were meant for each other.

Can one blame a man for his love? For his fidelity to everything he knows and can name as yours? At last, for his pigheadedness when like some voluntary Robinson is riveted to his little home land? I found any false note in the behavior of Moses. His atavistic attachment to own home has nothing to do with sentimentality of an old man. Just the opposite, there is something decent and true in his struggle for right to living on own rules. Sweetland is contrary and grumpy but he's a man I would love to have on my side in the hour of trial.

Unfortunately island Sweetland is condemned, is a place facing extinction. How many languages fell into disuse, how many professions disappeared, how many little communities were erased from maps in our lifetime? It's still happening. That way *Sweetland* reads like an elegy for vanishing. Like testimony of passing. Like homage for living there people. Like love song.

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## Amy says

Although the description of this one didn't do much for me, I kept hearing such good things that my curiosity got the best of me. And I'm so glad that I read this one. Such a beautiful story ... so beautifully written.

I didn't understand much of the history of resettlement in Newfoundland but this novel made that very history come alive with the amazing people in this novel. This novel is rather quiet (for the most part) ... it's focus on a small community and the many personalities within that community can make it feel like a small story. It has such strength and beauty. The people, the landscape, the sense of solitude that the writing brings. It's certainly not a loud, fast paced book so if you're looking for that, this isn't the book for you. But, if you want something lyrical, beautiful and full of meaning ... pick this one up.

The themes of memory, solitude, community and home are so well done with this novel. Michael Crummey's ability to weave these themes into such beautiful writing is just astounding. I found the story to be a meditation on solitude and change. Such a beautiful story that I'm so glad I gave a chance! Quietly impactful is a good description of this one for me!

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### **Jen says**

I'm done and it couldn't have been fast enough. Took 100 pages to finally grasp at something that had potential but snowballed into something that went on for far too long.

Moses Sweetland, 70, sits in his house on an island not far from St. John's, Nfld. The government is pressuring folks to sell and he is the only one holding out. Until, the tide does change and for circumstances I won't disclose, the choice to at last go with the majority doesn't come to fruition.

The story flits from present to the past reliving vivid moments. This is 'apocalyptic loneliness' with just a little too much of day to day survival. How many fires can one describe and how much winter can one weather? Sigh.

Did I enjoy this? Nope. I felt this to be a colder version of Castaway the exception of it being a personal choice that was an astounding blunder.

I've read some rave reviews from GR friends which was the only thing that kept me going. But alas, I just didn't connect with it and was happy when I was able to close the book on this one. I have updated this to a solid 3★. The writing was quite good it was more the subject and it's repetitiveness that was more than enough for me. Had it been clawed back by 40 pages, it just may have gotten a higher rating. Was having issues with the link.

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### **Diane says**

This book struck out.

I tried three different times to read this novel. THREE. Each time I got a little farther into the story, but I always got frustrated with the writing and gave up. I even tried listening to the audiobook, thinking I could trudge through, but I still became annoyed by the cliched characters and bad dialogue.

The story is that the government is trying to move everyone off a remote island called Sweetland, near Newfoundland. The main character, Moses Sweetland, refuses to leave because his family has lived there for hundreds of years. Everyone else on the island wants to take the resettlement money and move away, so Sweetland faces threats and ire.

I had wanted to read this novel because I like stories about small communities in far-away places, but my interest couldn't outlast the mediocre storytelling. Usually I like to highlight good quotes from the book at the end of my reviews, but I didn't find any worth noting.

Maybe you will like this novel more.

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### Carrie says

What just happened here? The book started out in a really promising, interesting way. Moses Sweetland is the last hold-out, who refuses to move off the tiny island that bears his name. He is an interesting character, as are the others that populate the island. But all the book has going for it are the characters. There is no story, and by the end of the book it felt as if the author had written himself into a corner, with only a bizarre, metaphysical way to get out of it. I wish the author had taken the story, such as it was, in another direction, but the poor guy really left himself with no place to go.

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### Book Riot Community says

There is a really good chance that this will be my favorite book of 2015. I asked my boyfriend to smother me with a pillow so I couldn't finish reading it, because then I'd be sad it was over, but for some reason he found that to be an unreasonable request. Geesh. But SEER EEE US LEE. It broke my damned heart to finish it. Moses Sweetland is a grumpy old man living on a small island in Canada (which is also named Sweetland.) The government wants to buy out all the island's inhabitants and use it for their own purposes, which all the citizens of Sweetland think is great, except for Moses. He's the only one refusing to sign the agreement, which is holding up the deal. This makes him very unpopular with his neighbors. This is a gorgeously written book, equal parts funny and sad, about home, and family, and loneliness, with small mysteries perfectly teased out until the end. My heart is fit to burst with love for it. — Liberty Hardy

From Best Books We Read in December: <http://bookriot.com/2015/01/06/riot-r...>

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### Cathrine ?? says

2★

As always the rating is based on my emotional response rather than the book's merit and does not do justice to the author's talent. Admirable and atmospheric prose, compelling storyline, great characters; yet rating a book I did not enjoy reading is challenging as I feel I'm being a bit unfair. I needed to ponder this one a bit and fear much of the narrative and nuance passed me by.

Reviewer Nicholas Herring wrote "**an impressively prolonged and often exhausting study of grief and ghosts centering around the disintegration of 69 year old Moses Sweetland.**"

That it was. I liked Moses, a man losing ground yet fighting to uphold those around him. It was tediously bleak and dreary and left me feeling rather gutted like the many rabbits caught in Sweetland's snares.

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### Jessaka says

I have learned that if I don't like the first two pages of a book I will never like it. I thought it would be the same with this book because it was so boring, nothing was happening, not even up to maybe the first 100

pages. So, why didn't I quit like I would otherwise? Well, I love the ocean and wanted to read a book on village life in another country. I am also reading books around the world and had looked for one set in the Netherlands. But after 25 pages I did put it down; a week later I picked up again. I did this over and over. At 100 pages or so I had it in my hands and almost put it in my bag of books to take to the library sale. For some nagging reason I set it back in my read pile. Then a few days later, I began wondering how Sweetland, the main character of the story, was doing.

Moses Sweetland is a 70 year old man who lives on an island off the coast of the Netherlands with friends, family and other residents. Many on the island had already left to find jobs elsewhere, leaving just a few residents, mainly the elderly and others who either had jobs on the island or couldn't work.

The government wanted to pay them all to leave the island because they didn't want the expense of bringing supplies to so few people. But first, all of the villagers had to sign the agreement or the government wouldn't pay any of them. Sweetland wouldn't sign. Of course not. That's the story. His act of defiance angered some in the village while others just tried to coerce him into signing. He even received threats. And all of this slow action is taking place in the first 100 pages that I was struggling through. Yet in that time you get to know the people, you get to know Sweetland, and I believe that was the purpose of Crummey's taking so long to pick up the pace. And maybe nothing really doesn't happen in a small village until someone throws in a monkey wrench. Sweetland did just that.

I had a read a review of this book and learned that after everyone leaves the island, after Sweetland had signed the papers, he goes back to live there by himself. That was almost a spoiler to me, and actually it was, because I thought, well, that's all folks. No. That wasn't all. There is yet another 200 or more pages left.

So next we have Someone who commits suicide, or so they think. Sweetland begins preparing to stay on the island without the villagers or the government realizing what he is doing. He is storing up food, planting a garden, and getting his gear ready. Then when he is alone on the island he is having flashbacks of his life and conversations with people who had lived there. We follow him as he fishes, gets lost in the fog, hunts rabbits, preserves food, feels so lonely that he begins listening more to his radio, a radio that only has batteries and so will soon die. Then he hears music in the church, feels something running past him in the dark, breaks into vacant homes looking for supplies, stops by the empty shops, finds a barge but not all in that order. The excitement continued throughout the book. I realized soon enough that was reading an adventure/ survival book--my favorite kind of book.

I finished the book and put it on my book shelf to be saved along with the other few good books that I keep and hope to read again when I have forgotten the stories.

Alone on the island:

"The weather had turned for fall and even the warmest days had an edge to them, the wind cold enough to warrant a jacket. The dark coming earlier each evening, and he was often surprised to turn from the film of light on the horizon to see the cover already settled into night. The abandoned buildings huddle and lifeless, their windows black. A gaudy rash of stars about them."

"Most days there was nothing else to see. He felt nearly invisible up there (in the lighthouse) and he didn't mind the feeling as a rule, though now and again he was blindsided by an apocalyptic loneliness he was afraid he might be unequal to."

"He caught a blur (at the cemetery) of movement outside the circumference of the light then, a shadowed scurry that made him swing around in the dark. His heartbeat in his ears."

"Sweetland kept his eyes on it (the moon) as he made his way along the path and was almost among the houses before he saw the light in Queenie Coffin's window. He stopped still, watching the flow of the dull yellow square. He blinked quickly three or four times. He scanned along the Church Side hills, out as far as the point where he saw nothing but the habitual black. And when he turned his eyes back to Queenie's house the window was dark."

Crummey has won awards for his writings. He is also a poet, which I feel makes his writing beautiful, brilliant, and lyrical. I felt that I was living on the island with him, with the people, and I didn't want them to leave the island, but I was also glad for the adventure that followed Sweetland's return to an island devoid of the residents.

Michael Crummey's next book, "Galore" has won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best Book, Caribbean & Canada and the Canadian Authors Association Literary Award; Finalist for the Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction, the Thomas Head Raddall Atlantic Book Award, and the Winterset Award. It also takes place in a small fishing village. I have just purchased it.

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