



Shiver

Nikki Gemmell

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"I can catalogue Antarctica by touch. The touch of air sucked dry on my cheek, the fur of a day-old seal pup, the touch of an iceberg, a blizzard, a lover, the touch of sweat at minus twenty-three, of a camera stuck to the skin on my face, of cold like glass cutting into my skin, of a snowflake, of a dead man, of a doctor's fingers on my inner thigh, of a tongue on my eye."

Shiver is Nikki Gemmell's first novel.

It is the story of Fin, a young woman who gets the chance of a lifetime to go to Antarctica.

Surrounded by the cruel beauty of the last great wilderness on earth, she finds herself transfixed by the power of the land.

Travelling and living with a close-knit and idiosyncratic team, Fin learns the rules and taboos of community life in Antarctica, and then promptly breaks the strictest taboo of all - she falls in love. The consequences are shattering.

Lyrical, haunting and sometimes painfully moving, Shiver is a first novel of great power and beauty.

Shiver Details

Date : Published January 1st 1997 by Vintage Books USA

ISBN : 9780091834494

Author : Nikki Gemmell

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Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Australia, Travel, Romance, Adventure, Literary Fiction, Womens Fiction, Chick Lit, Literature, 20th Century

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From Reader Review Shiver for online ebook

Suzanne says

Another book read in a day for me, and one of my favourites of this year too. Snuck in nicely!

This author writes of this theme often, a woman's needs, her searching and wanting to be fulfilled. Nikki Gemmell's writing style is captivating and lyrical, and I was carried away with it.

A young journalist embarks on an Antarctic voyage, and we see how she falls in love and with the haunting beauty of the ice. She loves and hates this as her romance blossoms, as it ebbs and flows.

I think this is a sensational book, the author's debut. I'm impressed. I did not love the last page or two, but this is small change, it doesn't sway my 5 star assessment.

“..of a snowflake, of a dead man, of doctor's fingers on my inner thigh, of a tongue on my eye.”

I loved being swept away on this journey today, I highly recommend it. It's made me want to re-visit The Bride Stripped Bare, which was crazy interesting.

Update 13 August 2016. I met Nikki Gemmell today, at a speaking event discussing the issue of proposed changes to copyright, specifically dodgy Australian parallel importing issues, not good for Aussie authors. I missed a lot of the discussion due to my catch up with Aussie Readers here on GR, but this is worth following up. Watch this space. This lady is as quirky as expected, and I enjoyed a nice chat. She is a lady that knows what she's doing in this industry. We talked about my studies and the busy role of 'mum'. What a lady. I'd like to know where my copy of Shiver went, couldn't get it signed..

sisterimapoet says

Further reinforcing the fact that I enjoy books with a cold setting - this was a great read.

Intense throughout, the reflections between the central character and the landscape bounced back and forth in a dazzling display.

At times it was almost painful to read.

Christie says

The first book I read by Australian author Nikki Gemmell was *The Bride Stripped Bare*. I fell in love with the way she wrote and so I found myself looking for other novels by her. *Shiver* is her first novel and it's worthy of praise.

"I can catalogue Antarctica by touch.

The touch of air sucked dry on my cheek, the fur of a day-old seal pup, the touch of an iceberg, a blizzard, a lover, the touch of sweat at minus twenty-three, of a camera stuck to the skin on my face, of cold like glass cutting into my skin, of a snowflake, of a dead man, of a doctor's fingers on my inner thigh, of a tongue on my eye."

Fin is a twenty-six year old Sydney-based radio journalist who gets the opportunity to travel to Antarctica to "capture noises." The trip down and her subsequent stay at the Australian station would be a compelling enough read all on its own because of how alien the landscape is and the weird subculture of scientists and others who make the journey. But Fin does something she isn't supposed to do - she falls in love.

Her relationship with 38-year-old biologist, Max, is – of course- intense because of where they are, their lack of privacy, the rules surrounding fraternization. Fin is buoyed by her feelings - not the first relationship of her adult life, but certainly the most important. She and Max share an unquenchable thirst for each other physically and are, in other ways, perfectly suited.

Of course, something tragic happens and even though you know it's coming, it's still horrible.

Gemmell herself spent time in Antarctica and says that this is her most autobiographical novel. Knowing the circumstances of her inspiration adds an extra layer of meaning to the book - but I suggest you wait to read about her real-life experiences until after you've finished the novel.

Lian Tanner says

A talented author with a gift for creating the highly charged atmosphere that I remember living in when I was in my twenties.

Meg says

I picked up this book as a chance to return to Antarctica. I was curious to see how an author would write about this indescribable place, as my fellow travelers and I came back speechless. It's difficult to explain the draw of the White Continent or how it affects you while you're there.

The truth is that Gemmell doesn't really describe what it's like in Antarctica. She does a *fantastic* job of

explaining the excitement of setting off on the adventure and the long days spent in the close confines of the ship. She paints wonderfully the archetypal characters who make the journey. However, I was not surprised to find that more than half the book involves the protagonist's trip to the continent, and comparatively few pages are spent once she arrives.

At this point, the book strays from its careful and evocative descriptions and becomes more plot-driven. The place itself is described simply by weaving in anecdotes and adventure stories, presumably gleaned from various Antarctic residents, and it misses the sense and feeling of the earlier chapters.

The plot itself is certainly not this book's strong suit, but I commend it for one thing: the emotion of the final chapters of the book are astonishingly similar to those I and my fellow travelers experienced on our return from Antarctica. I can't explain exactly why we all felt this way, and it certainly wouldn't make sense to anyone else. I would like to believe that Gemmell experienced that same and used this emotional response as the basis of the book, wrapping it in a simple plot that evokes similar feelings but in a more accessible way.

Sophia says

"A story about love and loss" öhm... I think NOT. It's a story about men beeing men in groups, creeping ppl out. About shaming women and women beeing scared. It is about warning women about sexual harassment and rape and women going "oh, I better pack condoms" What the hell did I just read?

I find it most interesting she even got on that boat. I would run the other way, or pack a gun. There is a little love and loss, but mostly fucking.

Stef Rozitis says

The setting of the book was so believable and detailed that I googled to see if it was a true story. Some details are changed but it is in fact based on something that happened to the author. This explains the vivid sense of place (Antarctica) and hundreds of details I wouldn't even have thought to ask about which was to me the best part of the book.

I also respect the author's experience of grief and that she probably had an emotional need to write this book. For this reason I am reluctant to be too critical, however as a reader I didn't enjoy the main plot of the book. Fin seems sort of man-crazy and desperate from the start. One of the things she is looking forward to from her Antarctica trip is the chance to be sexually harassed (p12), which initially I thought was going to be significant mainly for character development.

On the ship Fin's thoughts and conversations with other women frequently centre on whether men are "fuckable" or available. She seems determined to analyse every man in terms of whether she would or wouldn't want to fuck him, this is probably supposed to be "sex positive", "raw" and "honest" but I couldn't relate to it, nor the way the book constantly reinforced heterosexuality as natural and almost inevitable despite occasional cases of lip-service to the idea that some people might be gay/lesbian. By page 202 this has gone so far that Fin and the cook Chill have a conversation about the huge hardship of doing without sex for months at a time, and how it might make you "crazy". Really? There are many other less overt references to this sort of thinking too.

The romance between Max and Fin seems contextualised by this, mostly when something happens between them it seems to be "fucking" more than anything else, at least in the early days of the relationship. There does seem to be an emotional connection but this is downplayed until much later, when suddenly, instantly, Fin (who always claimed to Max that she doesn't do casual sex for some reason, despite thinking about it all the time) realises that this "means something" which of course is expressed as wanting to have his babies.

Nevertheless when he is absent she flirts with another man, and lies to him that she is not involved with anyone. It seems from the readers perspective that she is gearing up to sleep with him when luckily for Max, he joins her just in time.

I am not judging any of this, it is just hard to reconcile with the more romantic tone of the book subsequent to Max arriving at the base. I do wonder how much of this writing needed to be the way it is for personal reasons, but as a reader I really didn't enjoy it or find it relatable, inspiring or even challenging- just tedious. The stuff about Fin-tu was for me the most tender and relatable part of the book, I suffered at the abrupt and brutal ending of it (as I suspect the reader is meant to). Even then it was just a "oh and this happened" not something that integrated into the plot in some satisfying way.

I can see that other reviewers saw the book a lot more positively than I did, so my criticism is not necessarily a sign that someone else might not enjoy the book. But I was really disappointed with it and didn't even feel it delivered what the blurb promised.

Juma says

[She is a journalist who goes to Antarctica, gets harassed by most of the men while on the voyage, falls in love with one of them, tragedy strikes and she rediscovers her dream, and she may be pregnant (hide spoiler)]

PattyMacDotComma says

Young female journo goes to Antarctica (they call them JAFOs there - just another f*ing journalist) to interview various staff and file reports. She gets more involved than she expected and the story flows easily and well. I greatly enjoyed it, in spite of the realistic descriptions of the howling cold.

Annalie says

This book has been gathering dust on my bookshelf for years and now that I've finally read it, it has been a wonderful surprise. Nikki Gemmell writes beautifully; her description of the voyage to Antarctica and the continent itself transports the reader and it is the next best thing to having made the trip yourself. That alone would have been enough for me to enjoy reading it, but there was more: An array of interesting, true-to-life characters and an engaging, heartbreakingly story.

Stef O'connor says

I'm surprised at how many people gave this book 4 or 5 stars - first book I have read by Nikki Gemmell and can't say that I'm a fan.

To me, the book was all about nothing.....nothing plot, nothing characters, nothing, nothing, nothing.....thankfully it was a very short book so filled in time reading it

Krysten says

I read this book because I read every book about Antarctica. I also read it because I was worried my own novel-in-progress would sound like it had been cribbed from Gemmell's work. I was worried her words would sound better.

They don't. I am just going to be a douche here and say that I am relieved to find that Gemmell's work is not up to the high standards I set for myself. I am even more relieved that our stories are dissimilar enough that mine doesn't sound plagiarized. Her book's a little amateurish in style, honestly, and yes I realize this was her first book. People in the '90s hadn't really been exposed to the culture of Antarctica and she is brave to speak about the sexism that runs rampant in Antarctica as in any other male-dominated environment, but ultimately I think this book is a bit lacking in substance.

Like most books about Antarctica, *Shiver* falls victim to overexplaining the technical aspects of Antarctic travel and fetishizes its language and oh-so-quirky inhabitants. I find that that sort of thing falls flat. A good novel doesn't do that. A good writer uses language to show, not tell. A good writer thinks better of his or her audience and doesn't condescend to them by explaining technical details about this life that *surely* they know nothing about. Did Joyce spend half of *Ulysses* laying out general descriptions of all the streets of Dublin? Those details should take a backseat to the action and emotion of the story, exposing themselves subtly when it's appropriate and makes sense.

As for the plot, I found it a little weak. The characterizations of the people in the book were so brief and general I was genuinely confused when the narrator revealed which of the 758945 eligible men she'd developed feelings for. There was just nothing to go on. They were stick figures. There was so little detail about anyone, it was hard to care.

There are snatches of genuinely gorgeous phrase but those are often marred by some gross detail (like the guy licking grit out of her eyeball, yeeeeesh) that I think we're supposed to feel sentimental about.

I am glad I finally got my hands on a copy of this book. It was a fairly disappointing read but it also gave me a lot of confidence in the uniqueness and quality of my own creative writing. It was worth it just for that.

Dana says

Fairly interesting book- some of the language bothered me, but I enjoyed the narrators descriptions of Antarctica and the emotional changes she described as a part of the expedition.

Leslea says

This was my choice for our Book Club. I knew that Nikki's style of writing would stir the pot and it did. I thought her writing was fantastic - very economical with words and the words chosen pack a punch. A journey by ship to the Antarctica by a young journalist - her experiences on the ship, on the ice and falling in love with the landscape and Max. Half the Bookclub loved it, the other half not so sure. 5 stars from me - fantastic!

Katy says

I really didn't want this book to end. I did something I never do - read it painstakingly slowly so I wouldn't miss a single thing. Gemmell writes this novel very lyrically and very sparsely. She doesn't need to be effusive - she manages to be so precise about every feeling and every visual she transmits. Her precision is astounding, as clear cut as the bare white wilderness she describes. I was amazed at how she managed to capture such a vast space and create a clear visual of the dynamics on board the ship. I loved how she articulated the way that Antarctica made her feel: clean and stripped and open and alive. It made me see coldness in a way I'd never seen it before.

It was really interesting to read that Nikki Gemmell felt like she 'cannibalised' her own life in the writing of this novel and that she felt she would never write another novel that scraped her raw like this one did as she recounted many of her own experiences.

I read a lot of reviews slating Fin's romantic entanglements on the mission, but I did not mind them. I liked the intensity of her relationship with Max - I believed it. I believed it even more because it was never given a chance to thrive outside that white bubble of ice where it would probably have ended up the way most relationships do once they are forced to withstand the real world. But it remained frozen in its beginnings, perfect and untouchable. It's easy to idolise and revere a relationship like that. It's perfect and clean and uncomplicated in a way that things never are in reality.

And - SPOILER - I felt that Max's death was true and humble. Watching the sunset; enraptured in the beauty of that wild white world. He didn't see anything coming. As he says himself when he talks about his shipmates who stay below deck and play video games: 'They're people without curiosity. They can't be bothered to go out on deck to look at whales and auroras. Why are they here?'. He was different and he died because of that. It's very beautiful and very sad and I believe that Fin/Nikki's love for him will be endless because he died while he was still perfect and new and unknown to her.

I think the sign of any good book is total immersion. I was completely covered by the blizzards Gemmell conjured in this novel. I felt the coldness. I saw the sunsets and the auroras and the seals. I felt her loss, and her strange haunting that drove her to the Australian desert. I was gone from my own life for a little while.
