

SMALL PRINT

Small Print: Tales from Cook's Cove series resumes

Mary Sheppard's founding kids return to the outport series with teens of their own

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The Ides of March notwithstanding, a cosy, absorbing read seems about right for this season of not-quite-spring and the dregs of winter. Mary Sheppard's **Three for a Wedding** (Penguin, 254 pages, \$14, ages 12+) is a perfect choice for girls who want to lose themselves in a comfortable, engaging world and a family saga that's piquant and nicely sprawling.

Sheppard returns to the outport Cook's Cove, Nfld., in this third volume in her series. *Three for a Wedding* brings back Melinda, Kate and Rebecca, those tart and memorable teens from the first, 2001 book, *Seven for a Secret* (Groundwood, 189 pages, \$15, ages 12+; just reprinted), but with a leap. This sequel is set almost 30 years later, in 1988.

Melinda's daughter, 16-year-old Violet Blue, is the storyteller and star. Violet Blue despises her name ("really, really unfair and horrid") and works hard to resist her mom's efforts to interest her in leaving Cook's Cove and training to be a doctor.

But those are broader concerns to the summer's focus: Vi's sister is getting married and there's a wedding to plan, as well as the annual Cook's Cove Garden Party and Time. To help with all this (maybe), never-before-seen cousin Grace-Mae is coming from Boston to stay with Vi and her mom.

When Grace-Mae arrives in Cook's Cove with six suitcases and platinum-white hair, Vi can only roll her eyes. How can Grace-Mae possibly live up to the august Derby tradition?

Sheppard is well on her way with this instalment in the Derby family story, a refreshing mixture of communal festivities, familial tales and a down-to-earth, ironic narrator whose edge of humour allows for moments of seriousness but none of sappiness. While the novel evokes the doubts, complaints and ecstasies of a teenaged girl, it also provides a rich glimpse of the communities and conditions of outport Newfoundland. Good Canadian reading and nicely flavourful.